



The background is a wargame board for the Battle of Waterloo. It features a hexagonal grid with a central white circle. Blue lines represent rivers, and brown brushstrokes represent terrain. Several game pieces are scattered across the board, many with numerical values like '0-6', '4-4', and '7-4'. Some pieces have icons of buildings or units. Text like 'Ligne' and 'CHATELET' is visible on the board.

# WARGAMING *Waterloo*

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**CHARLES J. ESDAILE**

WARGAMING  
*Waterloo*



**WARGAMING**  
*Waterloo*

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**CHARLES J. ESDAILE, PHD**

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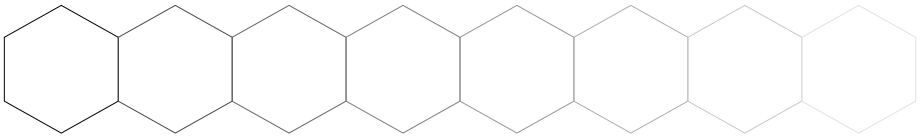
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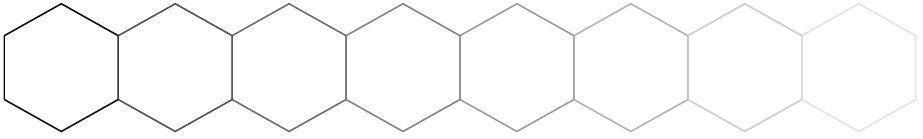


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# Foreword

In addition to the obvious importance of the Battle of Waterloo to European political history, it marked a watershed in military affairs. The end of the Napoleonic wars and the pause for thought it provided set in place the foundations of the laboratory in which the likes of Carl von Clausewitz formulated the principles of modern military science. Allied to this were developments in the practice of military history, and here William Siborne's work on the battle stands as a milestone in how these events are recorded. A soldier but not a veteran of the battle, Siborne published his *History of the War in France and Belgium* in 1815, which was later to appear as *History of the Waterloo Campaign* in 1848. His work is remarkable for two reasons: first, he asked veterans for their recollections of the event, and second, he carried out a detailed survey of the battlefield over a series of months. A century and a half before the internet revolutionized the speed of communication and the exchange of information, he was writing to every officer veteran of Waterloo he could track down to request their memories, with their responses guided by a questionnaire. Around 700 of them responded, and many of these responses have been published thanks to Gareth Glover, who shares Siborne's passion for making the voices of those who fought at Waterloo heard.<sup>1</sup>

As an archaeologist who has spent several months on the battlefield, working on a project that engages veterans of later wars, it is Siborne's time on the battlefield—the eight months he spent on a detailed survey of the terrain and related features—that impresses me the most. The maps he produced are an incredibly useful resource, providing a snapshot of the battlefield as it appeared in the 1830s.

If his historical method, using eyewitness accounts to build up a detailed picture of the battle, and his recognition of the importance

<sup>1</sup> Gareth Glover, ed., *Letters from the Battle of Waterloo: The Unpublished Correspondence by Allied Officers from the Siborne Papers* (Newbury, UK: Greenhill Books, 2003).

of walking the ground weren't enough, Siborne also provided us with a unique insight through the medium of his "large" model.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, his collection of firsthand accounts and the eight months he spent on the battlefield were to provide information for the model of the battle, which freezes time at around 1900 on 18 June 1815.

The model, which is today housed in the National Army Museum in London, was recently subject to laser scan survey, and the resulting computer model shows an impressive correlation with the present landscape—though, more importantly, it gives an idea of the nature of ground that has since been modified or entirely removed. A major act of battlefield heritage vandalism was performed as early as the 1820s on behalf of the Dutch royal family when several hundred thousand tons of earth were scraped up from Wellington's ridge to build the *Butte du Lion*, the massive conical monument topped by a bronze lion built on the spot where the Prince of Orange was wounded. Wellington was not pleased, and on visiting the site of his greatest victory in 1825 is popularly reported as exclaiming, "They've ruined my battlefield!"<sup>3</sup>

Siborne also earned Wellington's ire over his model, as gigantic an undertaking as the mound in some respects, but of course physically tiny in comparison, against which he deployed words such as *farce* and *fudge*. He accused Siborne of various historical calumnies, such as not taking into account the recollections of senior commanders, including himself. It was in relation to his interrogation of offi-

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<sup>2</sup> Siborne made a second Waterloo model of a smaller portion of the battlefield, focusing on La Haye Saint, at a larger scale in 1843–44. This is now on display in the Royal Armouries in Leeds and, like the first model, enjoyed a makeover in time for the 200th anniversary of the battle in 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Although widely quoted, as any Google search will demonstrate—and I add myself to that list—there is little evidence to back up the authenticity of this outburst. For one thing, there are very few references to what was probably Wellington's last visit to the battlefield in 1825, when the mound's construction was nearing completion (it took from 1820 to 1826). One of these is a mention in the journal of Mrs. Harriet Arbuthnot, a friend of the duke, but there is no reference to his opinion on the mound in those pages (see Rory Muir's commentary on his biography of Wellington: "Commentary for Volume 2, Chapter 15 Family and Friends, c1819–1827," *Commentary Explorer*, Rory Muir's *Life of Wellington*, accessed 29 January 2023). It might be Victor Hugo to whom we have to turn for the origin of what appears to be an apocryphal quote. If that was not disappointing enough, the wording according to him was less colorful: "They have altered my field of battle!" *Les Misérables*, trans. Isabel Hapgood (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2018), 307.

cers who fought at Waterloo that elicited Wellington's much-quoted axiom: "One might as well write the history of a ball as a battle."<sup>4</sup>

Wellington was eager to protect his own take on the battle, which included talking down the role played by the Prussians. Siborne bent to Wellington's complaints with his model, removing thousands of Prussian figures from the battlefield, but fought back with his book, essentially calling out the Iron Duke for claiming the Prussians arrived on the field much later than they did. Wellington, however, was not alone in accusing Siborne of being partial, and in 1847 one Dutch officer called his book "a miserable speculation on the vanity of his compatriots."<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to wargaming Waterloo, the most obvious connection to Siborne is his model, which uses around 70,000 10-mm figures to populate the landscape of the battle. All considerations of historical accuracy aside, the deployment of so many figures, providing a scale of around 1:2, is an incredible accomplishment. Wargamers playing with figures (or minis, as they are referred to in the hobby) can only dream of refighting the battle with these numbers, and we will overlook the recent taste for 2-mm figures for the purposes of this discussion.

My own first experience of wargaming, while not yet a teenager, involved a very small number of miniature troops, which, if memory serves, were 25-mm English Civil War figures deployed on the carpet of a friend's bedroom. Although an interest in model soldiers was to reignite in adulthood, it surprises me that I did not become a wargamer, despite investing in figures—at one point I had a reasonable number of 15-mm Anglo-Zulu War figures (made by Peter Laing, a long-ago-defunct manufacturer) and enjoyed painting them, but never got around to playing a wargame with them. My introduction to Napoleonic figures was, like that of many others, including Charles Esdaile, the Airfix 1:72 sets, though the complex uniforms of French Imperial Guards, Royal Artillery, Highlanders, and the rest were frustratingly beyond my ability to paint them.

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<sup>4</sup> "The history of a battle is not unlike the history of a ball." As quoted in Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol. 1 (Suffolk, UK: Richard Clay and Sons, 1907), 467.

<sup>5</sup> Capt Willem Jan Knoop, *Remarques Critiques sur l'Ouvrage du Capitaine Siborne* (La Haye, FR: Les Héritiers Doorman, 1847), 5.

## Foreword

For many years, I was content to be a casual spectator and consumer, buying a wargaming magazine every now and again and admiring the beautifully painted figures and impressive battle setups depicted therein. My inadequacies at painting Napoleonic figures were offset during this period by a monthly subscription to pre-painted 1:32 scale figures, each of which came with an illustrated booklet on the history of the unit depicted. There came a time, however, when my engagement with wargaming was rekindled.

Since 2015, I have been a field director and academic lead for Waterloo Uncovered, a charity involving military veterans in the investigation of the battlefield. Outside of that work, which included geophysics, metal detecting, and excavation, there was a request for activities to fill some time in the evenings back at our hotel. I suggested figure painting, an experience that would be enhanced by the presence among us of a talented exponent of the art.<sup>6</sup> Again thanks to fortuitous connections, a generous donation of figures and paints was made by Warlord Games. So it was that many a pleasant evening was passed by daubing paint on 28-mm wargames figures, with my own skills improving since childhood, though a lens was required to make up for the effect of age on my eyesight. The experience was truly relaxing, and one might say therapeutic, which fitted perfectly with the ethos of Waterloo Uncovered.

As we accrued figures, thoughts naturally turned to having a wargame. It was when I got home from the trip in 2018 that the lightbulb went off: we should not only refight Waterloo but should do so with the biggest tabletop wargame using 28-mm figures ever played. As with most ambitious ideas it seemed a little crazy at first, but other people received it enthusiastically, especially when I added that we could use such an event as a fundraiser for the charity. Out of these early discussions grew *The Great Game: Waterloo Replayed*.

The first problem was that, long-term casual interest in the pursuit notwithstanding, I was *not* a wargamer. The next step, then, was the recruitment of a team of experienced gamers, with things really starting to take shape when *Wargames, Soldiers and Strategy* magazine offered its support to the venture. Having decided that a record-breaking wargame would be defined by the numbers of fig-

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<sup>6</sup> David Ulke is a member of the project's well-being and mental health support team.

ures on the table, and then doing a little research on big games, for which it was very difficult to obtain verified numbers, we settled on at least 20,000 minis for The Great Game.

Next we had to find a venue for an event that was obviously going to take up a serious amount of real estate. The University of Glasgow, at which I am professor of conflict history and archaeology, seemed an obvious choice, with one hall in particular being ideal for our purposes. It was in the university's principal, Sir Anton Muscatelli, that we found an essential ally. After reading my proposal, he asked what we wanted from the university; it transpired he was both fascinated by the Napoleonic period and as an economist was familiar with wargames of a different type as a predictive tool. No thought was required before answering that we wanted the Kelvin Gallery. It had a big enough floor space that was overlooked by a wide gallery running around the entire room. This latter could not only accommodate spectators looking down onto the battlefield but would also allow us to stage a number of small demonstration games to add further interest for the visitor. It was not a small ask, as the commercial hire-out rate during the several days we required the hall would not give much change out of £10,000. But the answer to this request was yes, and with this generous donation in kind we were in business.

Social media and an article in the magazine garnered a huge amount of interest in the world of wargaming. This was just as well, as we were after a hundred players or more, all of whom we expected to pay for the privilege—this was a fundraiser after all. Small play tests followed, and one of these was hosted by the National Army Museum, where the proximity of Siborne's model provided further inspiration. Topping even that, though, was the game we played in the walled garden at Hougoumont, with the table dominated by our model of the farm with the real thing in the background. These helped us to settle on the rules to be adopted; Black Powder 2 winning out for its overall simplicity, with a few house modifications. All of this was of course the work of our wargamers, as I remained fascinated but also puzzled by the technicalities of the pursuit.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The experience and sage advice of Donald Anderson, Bill Gilchrist, and Jack Glanville was invaluable, but Midge Spencer, Hillery Harrison, Euan Loarridge, Ian Beal, and Guy Bowers also deserve to be mentioned in dispatches.

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Table design was a topic of heated debate; I quickly learned that wargamers can be an argumentative bunch. How were we going to accommodate more than 20,000 figures and 120 players on anything resembling the battlefield of Waterloo? I had visions of trapdoors and wargamers suspended over the table on *Mission Impossible*-type wires. The result was a simple compromise, consisting of four long tables, which, according to our battlefield geography, ran east to west. This configuration allowed players to operate from both sides of each table, which as a group represented a single battlefield; figures would be carried across the gaps as they moved from north to south or vice-versa. These decisions were made while also considering the terrain. The buildings were essential, and very good models of all the key farms, including Hougoumont, were commercially available. For the sake of simplicity, which was vital given the number of figures involved, we dispensed with the ridges and other topographic features (sunken ways, etc.). As Esdaile notes in the following pages, hills and ridges are always difficult to represent in games with miniatures and due to the mechanics of play are often left off board games.

A flat table, while essential for ease of play, even when populated with buildings and trees, did seem a little dull. What was required was a mat, with a number of companies providing these with various types of terrain, including roads and rivers, etc., printed on them. The problem was that no one made mats big enough to cover our tables (each of the four rows was 24 meters long and 2 meters wide). Unless we were going to use plain green baize—textured additions such as teddy bear fur to represent corn fields weren't an option as they would slow movement at this scale—we would need to commission something. It was clear to me that there was only one option: we needed Siborne's map. With financial support from Donald Adamson, who along with me was shouldering the greater part of the responsibility of organizing the event, we commissioned Tiny War-games, a company specializing in wargaming battle mats, which at a generous discount proceeded to break down Siborne's map into four strips, printing each on lengths of fabric that would cover the length of each table. This required 12 sections, each measuring 8 meters by 2 meters. This configuration required Siborne's map to be stretched out, our field being much longer than it was wide; but even so, the result was spectacular.

## *Foreword*

We had already decided to offer the map sections for sale after the game, and so had only one opportunity to assemble the map in its entirety before the mats were laid over the tables. This meant another hall and a team of my students to roll out the mats and line them up alongside one another. The photographs of us standing on this giant version of Siborne's map, which totalled 192 square meters, made the newspapers and earned extra publicity for the event. Not only were we going to play the biggest wargame, we had just created the biggest-ever printed map of a historical battlefield.

A major challenge, among many, was the provision of the required numbers of troops of the appropriate types on all sides; the Prussians were represented, but more of them presently. This required our wargamers to create orders of battle and then to ensure that units were provided from existing collections or painted to order. To make this work we regarded every one of our players as a colonel, each of them responsible for raising battalions or regiments. As players signed up to take part, they were assigned a unit, with many of them purchasing figures of the appropriate type in the numbers required. Again, as a reflection of the support, a couple of wargames figure manufacturers offered generous discounts to those providing evidence of participation.<sup>8</sup> Days and weeks were then spent painting these to an incredibly high standard. As the origins of the game lay in a therapeutic exercise in figure painting, we decided to extend this model by providing veterans groups, including the Erskine Veterans Charity, and schools with figures and paints.

After more than a year and a half of preparation, the weekend of the game arrived in June 2019 (on the closest available weekend to the battle's anniversary), with 120 players coming from all over the world. A game of this size would obviously require a team of umpires, and some of these came from Australia. The battle was refought over Saturday and Sunday, and to my relief the 200 folding tables, hired from a wedding caterer, arrived as planned on the Friday. Our team of officer cadets and students made a wonderful job of the setup, with figures positioned and labeled at preregistered locations on the table. As players arrived at the venue they checked in their figures, which were then counted by our auditors, led by an accountant. We were de-

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<sup>8</sup> Warlord Games and Perry Miniatures.



terminated to keep accurate and verified accounts of the number of figures deployed in the game, rather than counting figures in the room but never used on the table, as some big games seem to have done. At the beginning we had hoped for 20,000, but on the day fielded three 28-mm armies totalling 22,435 figures.

Despite applying long in advance, the Guinness World Records organization would not consider the forthcoming game for the title of largest historical tabletop wargame ever played. The category did not exist, so there were no previous records to break, but it seemed clear to us that this was establishing a new record. Even after an appeal, the decision was still no, as it was for a second submission for the largest-ever printed battle map. It was disappointing that the *Guinness Book of World Records* was happy to recognize the most baked beans eaten in five minutes with a cocktail stick but not willing to accommodate the concept of a huge wargame, played for charity no less. Whether this says something about public perceptions of wargaming is uncertain, but it would have been nice to be recognized.

The public were interested though, and we had hundreds of spectators visit on timed tickets over the weekend. Not only could they watch the battle unfold below them, they could take part in half a dozen participation games, which ranged in period from ancients to the Second World War. Other activities included a Duchess of Richmond Ball at the end of the first day of the battle, where guests were treated to a guided tour of the battlefield and the state of play after a hard day's fight. As part of our remit to educate, a free public symposium on the history and archaeology of Waterloo was hosted a couple of days before the game. Veteran and student engagement was also a key component of the event, with 40 of the former taking part as players, under the watchful eye of experienced "brigadiers," and the latter serving as war correspondents posting their dispatches directly onto social media. These reports were also broadcast to the room, and provided welcome updates on progress to players who, in a nicely realistic fashion, had little or no idea what was happening at the other end of the table.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note from *Wargaming Waterloo* that, in relation to command and control, there is no recorded instance of orders not getting to designated units on time or not arriving at all, though there is a clear difference between issuing orders on the basis of the information available, and this is likely to be due to the scale of the battle and the accompanying fog of war, to having an overall view of the battle.

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At the opening of the game, I read out a letter of encouragement from none other than the current Duke of Wellington. Our logo had to feature the equestrian statue that for as long as anyone can remember has had a traffic cone perched on the duke's head, as it is now a Glasgow icon. After all the effort put in by a good many people, it was now down to the players, and at that point I allowed myself a sigh of relief. Players, all of them attired in the Great Game polo shirts that became the must-have souvenir of the event, sprang into action, and under the watchful eyes of the umpires the battle commenced.

Although the records exist, a fully detailed account of the battle has yet to be written, but perhaps one might as well write the history of a ball. Generous reviews of the game did appear, including the article by Noel Williams in the September 2019 edition of *Miniature Wargames* magazine. Reading it now, I am reminded that despite much talk of not making the same mistakes twice, the fight for Hougomont once again became a battle within a battle, sucking in huge numbers of troops. The difference was that this time the French succeeded in taking the place, as they did farther down the table with La Haye Sainte. Despite these successes, the gradual arrival of the Prussians from the east (moved from separate holding tables according to a set of rules that I would need to be reminded of) the French were kept at bay. I recall a really entertaining turn where Napoléon came within a hairsbreadth of falling into enemy hands. He was, however, plucked to safety by a roll of the dice made by our principal, who at the time was sporting an emperor's hat I had gifted him.

At the end of day two, it had been such a close-run thing that the decision was not clear until the head umpire, Bill Gilchrist, announced, to groans and cheers, that the battle had been a narrow allied victory. In reading *Wargaming Waterloo*, it is obvious that I was not alone in hoping for history to be overturned with a French victory. Not surprisingly for a game of this size, not everything was perfect, and as Williams points out, it was undoubtedly the umpires who kept the potential train wreck of more than 100 players, including novices, more than 22,000 figures, game-specific rules, and space and time constraints on the tracks. When all is said and done though, when looking back like an old general mulling over past campaigns, I am more than happy with Williams's judgment that "the abiding impression of every participant was a well-managed game conduct-

ed with 100 friends.” The fact that we also managed to raise £15,000 for Waterloo Uncovered in the bargain can only be the plume on the shako.<sup>10</sup>

Siborne would hopefully have enjoyed the Great Game, if only to see his map put to such good use, more so perhaps than the first Duke of Wellington, not least because his figure on the table was sporting a traffic cone. The Great Game worked as a game but it was very far away from a simulation, which as Esdaile points out, is in any case impossible with figure-based games. One only needs to recall the distortion of the battlefield’s proportions as noted above to see how many compromises are involved. It seems fitting then that unlike this foreword, the majority of what follows concerns board games rather than games played with miniatures. As *Wargaming Waterloo* explains so well, it is these games that bring us closest to simulating the historical event, albeit without the unpleasant realities of mass death.

Much as I love miniature soldiers, and I have gone on to give those old Airfix figures the credible paint jobs they always deserved, it was clear even to me that board games held the real potential for learning about the battle through play. So it was that the Christmas following the Great Game, Santa paid attention to my wish list and left not just any old board game under the tree, but Wellington’s Victory, probably the biggest of them all. If I had read *Wargaming Waterloo* before then, it is highly unlikely that such a behemoth of a game, which includes a textbook-length set of rules and hundreds of cardboard gaming pieces, would have been my first choice. The sad truth is that after a cursory read of the rules, and not being able to make head nor tail of them, I got no further than setting up the pieces, a task that took up an entire afternoon.<sup>11</sup> For several days the game sat there, looking very impressive and not a little daunting as it waited to be played, but the rules made no more sense than they did at the outset and inevitably the table was required for other purposes and so all was packed away, and the lid has not been lifted from that day to this.

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<sup>10</sup> For anyone thinking of staging something on this scale, the true cost of the event, if we disregard goodwill and expensive essentials such as hall provision in kind, would have been well over £20,000.

<sup>11</sup> I was heartened to discover from the pages of *Wargaming Waterloo* that even the simple act of setting up a game by placing the counters in their correct positions can be educationally beneficial.

## Foreword

There is an old adage that goes along the lines of “I’m a lover not a fighter.” Well, it is clear to me that I am a painter not a player. It might seem odd then, after admitting to not being a wargamer, that I can still be enthusiastic about *Wargaming Waterloo*. It is here that Esdaile has scored a surprising victory. On a basic level, the book provides insightful reviews of most, if not all, of the board games that take Waterloo as their subject matter, but it delivers much more. As the author points out, a game aiming to approach anything akin to a simulation of the battle must make winning hard for the French, whereas a game designed to provide each side with a fair chance of winning must be inherently inaccurate.<sup>12</sup>

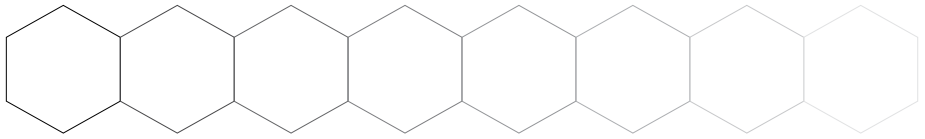
Hindsight is of course a factor in any attempt to game Waterloo, or any other historic battle, and the recognition that Napoléon’s ignorance of the approach of the Prussians, which has gone largely unacknowledged by historians, makes for some fascinating insights. As Esdaile demonstrates, we can gain an enhanced understanding of the battle through wargaming, but the same can also be said of his book, which makes as much of a contribution to the history of the battle as it does to the gaming of it, and as such it would be a shame if its readership were limited to those who have gamed Waterloo or intend to do so.

Tony Pollard  
Professor of Conflict History and Archaeology  
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<sup>12</sup> In the early days of planning, I suggested that we should refight Ligny and Quatre Bras on day one and then Waterloo with the troops still left standing on day two. I quickly abandoned this idea when my colleagues pointed out that this was going to be ridiculously complicated to stage, before warning me that we ran the risk of arriving on the field of Waterloo with no armies left to fight.





# Preface

As I was in the very midst of writing this book, the world was shaken by an event more cataclysmic than any that has yet occurred in my lifetime, namely the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. At the time of writing, the final outcome of this culmination of the growing hostility to the West that has come to characterize the rule of Vladimir Putin remains to be decided—history, in fact, remains in the making—but, within a few days of the outbreak of the conflict, news broke of a development that is directly pertinent to the pages of *Wargaming Waterloo*: the organization in response to the growing international tension by the U.S. Marine Corps University (MCU) of a wargame of the Russian attack that successfully predicted many features of the first fortnight of the conflict. In brief, this was based on a two-stage process. Of these, the first was design. Thus, working on the basis of intelligence relating to the known deployment, strength, and capabilities of the Russian and Ukrainian forces and careful assessment of such factors as terrain and communication, those involved first developed a set of mechanisms that in effect subjected the decisions of the gamers to the acid test; that is, what was likely to occur should said decisions be put into effect in the real theater of operations. Design completed, there followed implementation, in that two teams of players, one representing the attackers and the other the defenders, sought to use the systems put in place by the designers to project the likely outcome of Russian aggression. As already intimated, meanwhile, in the short term, at least, the result could not have been more encouraging: by attacking on a very broad front, the Russians contrived to make themselves too weak to obtain decisive success at any given point, while, with their determination to defend their country boosted to the skies by Russia's brutal behavior, the NATO-trained Ukrainians were frequently able to secure tactical superiority. This is not to say that the Russians made no

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progress—indeed, their performance in the wargame was marginally better than it was in the days of real conflict that followed—but the determination of Volodymyr Zelensky to refuse to kowtow to Putin was completely vindicated and notice given to the West that it could be reasonably certain that deliveries of arms and munitions would not just be swallowed up in the jaws of defeat.<sup>13</sup>

In a fashion that is particularly timely, then, the MCU wargame of the invasion of Ukraine has shown the relevance of wargaming to present-day political and military discourse. However, if said practice is useful as a means of predicting the future, it is also a good way of understanding the past, recreating this or that historical battle or campaign being likely to be far more effective as a means of grasping the march of events than merely exploring the latter via the printed page, however well-written. From this point, meanwhile, we can move a step further in that wargaming is also a means by which the past is represented to the present, whether this is through the production of the model soldiers relied on by one version of the genre, or the development of packages—in essence, board games—designed to allow gamers to explore the military aspects of particular historical periods. It is the object of this work to explore all three of these aspects of the practice, but, to achieve this, the decision has been taken to discuss one battle alone, namely that which brought about the final downfall of Napoléon Bonaparte 3.2 kilometers south of the little Belgian town of Waterloo on 18 June 1815. As to why this particular action has been fastened on, the reasons are manifold. In the first place, to this day it is the subject of both massive interest and furious controversy, while, particularly in terms of board games (a term that is, perhaps, better replaced by *map games* of the sort used in the MCU exercise described above), its representation presents particular problems, not that this has stopped game designers from

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<sup>13</sup> See James Lacey, Tim Barrick, and Nathan Barrick, “The Wargame Before the War: Russia Attacks Ukraine,” *War on the Rocks*, 2 March 2022. Whether President Putin and his commanders engaged in a similar activity is unknown, but, if they did, it is clear that they must throughout have acted on the basis of a best-case scenario in which the Ukrainians failed to put up anything more than token resistance; the Russian-speaking minority rallied to the invaders en masse; the Russian Army, Navy, and Air Force performed in the competent and professional fashion that a decade or more of reform and rearmament might have been expected to produce; and the West reacted with little more than ineffectual hand-wringing.

hurling themselves into the task, the latest count suggesting that the Hundred Days have spawned around 60 such attempts. And, in the second, it poses a serious research question: the extent to which Napoléon had a serious chance of attaining victory when he confronted Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington, at Mont Saint-Jean, a discussion that, as we shall see, can be extended to include the strategic situation that would have pertained had the emperor somehow gained the day.

In addressing its objectives, *Wargaming Waterloo* will confine itself to the discussion of the use of the media represented by board games and model soldiers only, this being a decision for which I make no apologies. As can scarcely be denied, there are other ways of gaming the battle that are radically different from those that will be looked at here; of these, one that is a particular favorite is the card-game version marketed by Columbia Games under the title *Eagles: Waterloo, 1815*.<sup>14</sup> Another example, of course, is the route that is offered by information technology. For the very simple reason that my professional life already requires me to spend far more hours at the computer screen than I would like, I confess that I have little knowledge of this sector, but it is impossible not to mention the many computer games that can be purchased, good examples being *Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle* (Breakaway Games) and *Waterloo* (Talonsoft).<sup>15</sup> For something more state-of-the-art, meanwhile, the obvious

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<sup>14</sup> Despite the quirky choice of format, *Eagles: Waterloo, 1815* is a particularly elegant reconstruction. All four of the main actions can be fought using the components provided, while they can also be linked together to provide an overview of the campaign. Thanks to a set of rules that is a model of clarity and simplicity, play proceeds extremely swiftly; gamesmanship on the part of the players is kept to a minimum; and the *Waterloo* game is a real contest: in brief, Napoléon can win, but only if he has the troops to launch an overwhelming assault on Wellington's forces right at the outset of the game, if the Anglo-Dutch are unlucky with respect to the forces they have to hand to defend Mont Saint-Jean when play begins, and if the Prussians are slow to arrive (it should be noted that neither the French nor the allies can regard anything of the sort as being guaranteed in this respect, the mix of units available to them being governed by a random card draw). In other words, what we have is a recreation of exactly the sort of very difficult proposition that Napoléon was facing on 18 June 1815, coupled with a recognition that Wellington faced his own problems, namely the polyglot nature of his army and the possibility of Prussian bungling. For further details, see "Eagles: Waterloo, 1815," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 30 August 2014.

<sup>15</sup> For reviews of these packages, see Richard Moore, "Reviews: Wargames," Napoleon Guide.com, accessed 26 June 2020.



place to go is *Napoleon Total War* (Sega), a system that contains within it scenarios for Ligny and Waterloo.<sup>16</sup> Yet, there cannot but be felt to be serious problems with a general move in the direction of war on screen at the expense of war on paper. Setting aside the fact that the sheer investment in time and money that is involved in the development of a computer game ensures that few games are produced other than for a mass market whose members are only interested in blood and guts and want to take the role of individual combatants, the dimensions of even the biggest computer screens make it hard to take in the whole of a single battlefield at a glance, while the fact that combat is handled automatically means that it is much harder to comprehend the exact contribution of individual factors—above all, quality, numbers, terrain, and leadership—to any given result. As for the process of playing the game, this can be just as lengthy and cumbersome as it is in the case of board wargames, one of the many problems being that, because computers can handle infinite numbers of individual units, be they regiments of soldiers, ships, or even individual aircraft, designers make the mistake of burdening their creations with levels of detail so excessive that players are completely overwhelmed.<sup>17</sup>

To return to the rationale for this work, a further reason for exploring wargaming as a means of studying and representing the past is that, as will become clear, for reasons of prejudice as much as anything else, the subject is one that historians shy away from, and that despite the fact that the representation of the past, of which wargames, to reiterate, constitute an obvious example, has become an ever more fashionable subject of discussion, and all the more so given the growing emphasis on the idea of public history—the manner in which history is perceived and experienced beyond the ivory tower. If this work has done something to redress the balance, then I will be well pleased, though writing it has been a real joy in and of itself, if only because it has reminded me that my youth was perhaps slightly less misspent than I sometimes think! What is certainly the case is that it has allowed me to rediscover something of the sense of excitement and fellowship that characterizes my memory of those

<sup>16</sup> See “Battle of Waterloo,” *Total War Wiki*, accessed 26 June 2020.

<sup>17</sup> See Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 23–26.

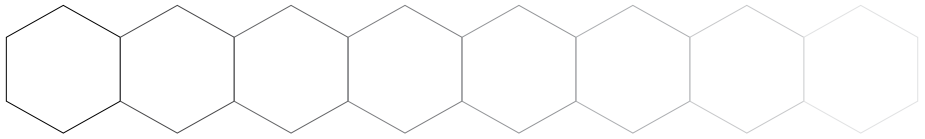
## Preface

distant days. Thus, many friends both old and new have encouraged me in the writing of this work and, in some cases, provided me with more material assistance, those involved including Matthew Flynn, John Craufurd, Rory Muir, Gareth Glover, Ed Coss, Jack Gill, Lance McMillan, Bob Cordery, Jim Owczarski, John Haines, Gareth Lane, Euan Loarridge, and Dean Lush. Beyond such folk, at the U.S. Marine Corps University Press, Angela Anderson has throughout taken a personal interest in the project and been a tower of strength, while she has been ably supported by Stephani Miller; at Pen and Sword Books, Tara Moran very kindly obtained permission for me to use the substantial sections of my *Walking Waterloo* and *Napoleon, France and Waterloo: The Eagle Rejected* (2016) that are reproduced in chapters 2, 6, and 7; at the University of Glasgow, Professor Tony Pollard has, of course, contributed an exceptionally generous foreword; and, on the Isle of Man, my partner, Sinéad, is owed more than I could possibly say, while her worth far outweighs any words that I could use to try to do her justice.

So much for the thanks I owe in a personal sense, but there is another group of people who are also worthy of mention. I refer here to the legion of game designers whose work is the *sine qua non* of this book. Far too many to list in their totality, I hope they will forgive me if I confine myself to a few of the giants among them, namely Richard Berg, Richard Borg, James Dunnigan, Mark Herman, and Kevin Zucker. To one and all, a humble tribute: I could not begin to imagine matching the extraordinary work of creation of which a tiny part is cataloged in this book.

Charles J. Esdaile, Douglas,  
February 2023





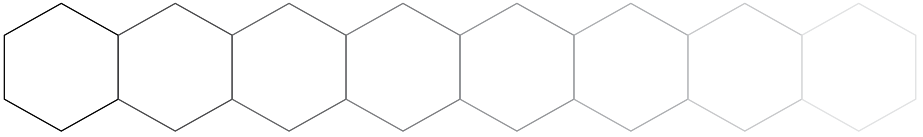
# Chronology of Events, February–July 1815

- 26 February** Napoléon sets sail from Elba
- 1 March** Napoléon lands at Antibes
- 5 March** Napoléon declared an outlaw by the Congress of Vienna
- 20 March** Napoléon enters Paris
- 25 March** Seventh Coalition formed at Vienna; allies abjure separate peace and agree to fight on until Napoléon is overthrown
- 23 April** Napoléon promulgates so-called Additional Act
- 15 June** Napoléon invades Belgium
- 16 June** Napoléon defeats Blücher at Ligny, while Ney is held to a draw at Quatre Bras
- 18 June** Napoléon is defeated at Waterloo
- 22 June** Napoléon abdicates for the second time
- 4 July** France capitulates to the Seventh Coalition
- 9 July** Napoléon surrenders to the British



WARGAMING  
*Waterloo*





## *Chapter 1*

# The History and Development of Wargames

Wargaming has a long history. Definable at the most basic level as the attempt, first, to simulate the conditions of military and/or naval combat at a specific moment in time at the tactical, operational, or strategic level, and, second, to apply that simulation to real or imaginary battles or campaigns in an attempt either to study the workings of particular combat systems or technologies or to work through potential courses of action, it made its initial appearance in the course of the eighteenth century when a series of individuals set about endeavoring to capitalize on the endless “cabinet wars” that gripped Europe at that time by producing commercial leisure products aimed at the educated classes that sought to exploit the growing public interest in international relations suggested by the rising demand for newspapers and pamphlets. First in the field was a professor from the German state of Brunswick named Johann C. L. Hellwig, who in 1780 produced a board wargame in which pieces representing infantry, cavalry, and artillery maneuvered on a stylized map showing towns, villages, hills, mountains, forests, and swamps based on a square grid and sought to eliminate one another in much the same way as chess. Hellwig did not remain alone for very long, however, for in 1796 he found himself facing stiff competition from a more advanced version of his game that had been developed by another German university professor named Karl Venturini. How far the two pioneers were successful commercially is hard to say, but the idea clearly caught on for, by 1830, inspired in part by the struggle against Napoléon, no fewer than nine more battle games had appeared in one part of Germany or another. Many of these were but developments of



chess—stylized conflicts between symmetrically deployed armies of equal size fought out on a checkered board—but the idea clearly began to get about that such clashes had nothing to do with reality, the result being that some designers began to experiment with unequal forces and asymmetrical deployment.<sup>1</sup>

Hellwig and Venturini and their fellows may have an honored place in the history of the *board game*, but, in terms of that of the *wargame*, the palm must rather go to a Prussian official named Georg Leopold von Reisswitz who developed a much more scientific project in an attempt to improve the training of the Prussian Army in the wake of its humiliation in the battles of Jena and Auerstädt. Reisswitz had for some time been recreating battles in miniature with the aid of porcelain figures and a sand table, but he immediately recognized that such methods were not suited to his purposes, what he went for being something that was both far more portable and far more abstract. Thus, his apparatus, which he named *kriegsspiel*, consisted of two armies comprising metal blocks representing units of infantry, artillery, and cavalry that maneuvered and fought one another at the behest of two teams of generals according to a set of complex rules governing movement, fire, and *melee* on a square grid made up of square tiles painted with a variety of physical features that could be arranged in whatever fashion was desired so as to create a multitude of different terrains. Presented by Reisswitz to Frederick William III in 1812, meanwhile, his invention was immediately pressed into service as one more weapon in the struggle against Napoléon. How much use was actually made of the one set that was all that was produced in the first instance is unknown, but there is no doubt that the idea had a considerable impact, for every unit in the Prussian Army was issued a similar set in the years after Waterloo, while 1824 saw

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Schuurman, “Models of War, 1770–1830: The Birth of Wargames and the Trade-off between Realism and Simplicity,” *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 5 (July 2017): 442–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2017.1366928>. For those interested in exploring such games, in 1997 Parker Brothers produced a game called *Lionheart* that was very similar to many of the games listed by Schuurman, while there is also the well-known *Campaign*. See “*Lionheart*,” [BoardGameGeek.com](http://BoardGameGeek.com), and “*Campaign*,” [BoardGameGeek.com](http://BoardGameGeek.com), both accessed 23 June 2020. With regard to Waterloo in particular, readers are referred David Crook’s blog. The many projects Crook developed include a version of the battle fought on a standard chessboard. See “Waterloo a la Carte . . . Game Number 56, Part 1,” *Wargaming Odyssey* (blog), accessed 14 November 2020.

Reisswitz's son, Georg Heinrich, produce a simplified set of rules and institute a series of changes aimed at making the design more flexible, of which the most important was the substitution of large-scale maps for the original gridded tabletop and model scenery.<sup>2</sup>

From the 1820s onward, spurred on by rapid developments in military technology and the ever-more-belligerent climate that characterized Continental Europe from 1850 onward, *kriegsspiel* became an increasingly common feature in the experience of many Prussian officers, while in 1867 a new version of the game was introduced that was designed to capture the changes that had taken place on the battlefield; changes that, in brief, had rendered the old close-order blocks completely obsolete. Thanks to Prussia's victories in the wars of 1864, 1866, and 1870–71, meanwhile—not least because the tactical lessons derived from playing the game were widely regarded as an important factor in the Prussian triumph—in the 40 years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War its use spread to many other European armies, while the use of a variety of updated forms of wargaming has remained a standard part of military planning right up to the present day.<sup>3</sup> Yet the predictive, deliberative, and training functions that are at the heart of this phenomenon are not the only reasons why wargaming has survived. To understand this, one has only to consider the nomenclature. Thus, no more than Reisswitz did, we do not talk about *war simulations* but about *wargames*. No sooner is the subject mentioned than it becomes clear that we are in the presence of two issues that are fundamental to human life, namely competition and relaxation. Herein, of course, lies the secret of the Reisswitzes' suc-

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<sup>2</sup> Philipp von Hilgers, *War Games: A History of War on Paper* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 43–57, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/7995.001.0001>; and John Curry, ed., *Peter Perla's The Art of Wargaming: A Guide for Professionals and Hobbyists* (Keynsham, UK: Lulu Press, 2012), 54–64. For a generally accessible English-language version of *kriegsspiel*, see G. von Reisswitz, *Kriegsspiel: Instructions for the Representation of Military Manoeuvres with the Kriegsspiel Apparatus*, ed. W. Leeson (Hemel Hempstead, UK: B. Leeson, 1983). To complement his set of rules, Leeson published a map of Waterloo, but no record has been found of anyone ever trying to refight the battle using Reisswitz's system.

<sup>3</sup> As witness Paul Schuurman, "A Game of Contexts: Prussian-German Professional Wargames and the Leadership Concept of Mission Tactics, 1870–1880," *War in History* 28, no. 3 (July 2021): 504–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344519855104>, victory in the Franco-Prussian War did not see any lessening of interest in *kriegsspiel* in the German officer corps.

cess in that they succeeded in marrying instruction with enjoyment: Prussian officers may have been ordered to address themselves to kriegsspiel, but, to judge from the number of ad hoc groups that sprang up to experiment with the system—to play the game—when it first appeared and continued to do so for many years thereafter, it is evident that the orders concerned were far from unpopular—that professional formation, indeed, was mixed with conviviality.<sup>4</sup>

Why, however, was this the case? The clue, of course, is the original game board with its square grid. Evidently, at the back of Reisswitz the elder's mind was none other than the game of chess. Chess has been in existence in its modern form in western Europe since at least the beginning of the second millennium, while it takes but a moment's thought to realize that, like Shatranj (the Indian, or possibly Persian, original from which all such games were derived), and its numerous Eastern counterparts—Shogi, Xiangqi, Janggi, Makruk, Shattar—it is a stylized battle in which two armies formed of different military units seek to capture territory and destroy one another. Meanwhile, if chess is the most sophisticated game of this sort, there are other traditions with very different origins (a fact that is significant enough in itself) that in one way or another mimic warfare in the ancient or even prehistoric world. The Greeks had Polis, the Romans Ludus Latrunculorum, the Vikings Halatafl (or, as it became known in English, Fox and Geese), the Arabs al-Qirq (from which we get draughts), the Japanese Go, and the many peoples of Africa Mancala. To these may be added the numerous three-in-a-row games such as Tic-Tac-Toe (possibly the most ancient of them all) and the Germanic or Viking Nine Men's Morris. In such games, there is a marked difference from real warfare in that both sides are equal, the terrain a blank sheet that favors neither the one player nor the other, and what Carl von Clausewitz would have termed *friction*—in the gaming world a factor conventionally represented by chance—com-

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<sup>4</sup> For the history of kriegsspiel, see Matthew Kirschenbaum, "Kriegsspiel," in *Debugging Game History: A Critical Lexicon*, ed. Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 279–86; Jorit Wintjes, "Not an Ordinary Game, But a School of War': Notes on the Early History of the Prusso-German *Kriegsspiel*," *Vulcan: Journal of the Social History of Military Technology* 4, no. 1 (2016): 52–75; and Jorit Wintjes, "When a *Spiel* Is Not a Game: The Prussian *Kriegsspiel* from 1824 to 1871," *Vulcan: Journal of the Social History of Military Technology* 5, no. 1 (2017): 5–28.

pletely absent, but sometimes the mechanisms were rendered more sophisticated by a drive for greater realism. Let us take, for example, the Viking game of Hnefatafl (the name means King's Board, as opposed to Halatafl, which stands for Tail Board). Played throughout northwestern Europe until finally eclipsed by chess in the seventeenth century, it models a situation in which a king and his loyal retainers are trapped by a much larger army, the game centering on the efforts of the king to escape to fight another day while his men die bravely trying to protect him (an interesting feature of this particular game is that, in imitation of armies that were composed entirely of dismounted warriors wielding shields and spears, the pieces, including the single king, are identical in their powers). As if the concept of unequal sides and starting positions was not enough, in what appears to have been a later version, the distances pieces could move were governed by the throw of a die, the players thereby being limited not just by the boundaries of their intellect and imagination but also the vagaries of what can be conceived of as such factors as morale and the weather. Meanwhile, far away in Burma, the local version of chess, Sittuyin, had long since incorporated a mechanism whereby the two generals could choose how to lay out their pieces, thereby opening the way for deployments that were driven by rival strategies rather than strategies that were driven by one unvarying deployment.<sup>5</sup>

Whether Norse or Burmese, these developments were extremely important because with them there emerged the possibility of not just the game—a symmetric contest between two equal sides in a setting that is both entirely abstract and entirely neutral—but the simulation—a recreation of a clash between two sides that could

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<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to chess and its numerous cousins, see AncientChess.com, accessed 25 August 2014; and, more particularly, H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Board Games Other than Chess* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1952); and H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1962). See also the wide range of strategy games contained in Arnold Arnold, *The World Book of Children's Games* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1975), 210–48. The concept of Hnefatafl has occasionally been borrowed by modern manufacturers, a case in point being the fact that the current author's very first board wargame was a refight of the battle of the Little Bighorn, in which the U.S. player had to get the figure of Gen George A. Custer to the safety of one of two exit spaces at one end of the board, while said commander's badly outnumbered troopers fought off Sitting Bull's attacking warriors.

well be very different in both size and composition, not to mention arrayed in positions of greater or lesser advantage. However, to return to the central argument, the instinct to play wargames is both universal and, so far as can be judged, virtually as old as humanity itself.<sup>6</sup> Nor is this surprising. On the one hand, battle, or, at least, conflict, was a frequent experience in most societies, and it therefore followed that many minds directed themselves to its principles, or, very possibly, sought to quell their fears by demonstrating to themselves that success was possible or even assured.<sup>7</sup> We are back at the training and predictive function here, of course, but it was not just that. Quite simply, people enjoy pitting their wits against one another, not least because, consciously or otherwise, they realize that playing such games does not just pass the time but also hones their mental faculties. With chess and all the other strategy games, this is about as far as it goes, but add in model soldiers and representational terrain and all of a sudden, the perspective changes yet again. Let us begin with the rulers for whom the first collections of model soldiers were made (the obvious examples here are the serried ranks of wooden and terracotta warriors that have been found in tombs in Egypt and, on a much grander scale, China). Setting aside supposed purposes in the afterlife, these figures constituted a visible reminder of a military strength that beyond doubt constituted a great comfort to their progenitors. For a variety of reasons, including, not least, size, we may assume that the pieces concerned were intended for static purposes only, and that their most active service consisted in being lined up for review from time to time. At length, however, technological change brought with it new developments. Across the length and breadth of the territories of the Roman Empire and many earlier polities, large numbers of small figurines, most of them military in character, have been discovered that may well have been produced as votive offerings but could easily have been played with by small

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<sup>6</sup> For an interesting discussion of this conclusion, albeit one based on the prevalence of wrestling in the ancient world, see Martin van Creveld, *Wargames: From Gladiators to Gigabytes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11–13.

<sup>7</sup> Such views may be hard to stomach, but, as van Creveld has written, “Life among hunter-gatherers, slash-and-burn horticulturalists and fishing communities is not all peaceful fun and games. Not only do the great majority of the peoples in question engage in warfare . . . but that warfare is often exceedingly murderous.” Van Creveld, *Wargames*, 24.

children, while excavations have also thrown up jointed wooden figures that presumably lived the sort of exciting life experienced by the Action Man of the current author's childhood. Such action figures were also played with extensively in the medieval world, while miniatures reminiscent of those of the Romans and other ancient civilizations may well have been among the possessions of the children of the wealthier classes. With the rebirth of regular armies in the seventeenth century and the concomitant impact of the so-called military revolution, a development that vastly increased the complexity of the problem of command and control, considerations of social utility intensified this tendency. Thus, across the length and breadth of Europe, courts commissioned some of the finest craftsmen of the age to produce large armies of model figures in materials ranging from wood through tin and pewter to solid gold. Among the beneficiaries, it seems, were the future Philip IV of Spain, the future Louis XIII, Louis XIV, and Louis XV of France, the future Frederick IV of Denmark, the future Peter III of Russia and, last but not least, the only son of Napoléon Bonaparte, the aim of such gifts, of course, being to use playtime in the nursery to condition the young boys concerned into accepting and understanding their role as future military commanders. Nor was it just the rich who were able to act out military fantasies, for, from about the same time, the burgeoning printing industry began to turn out innumerable sheets of paper figures that could be colored, cut out, and glued to sheets of pasteboard, while bakers took advantage of the new fad by producing squads of gingerbread soldiers. And, last but not least, from the late eighteenth century onward the development of flat (i.e., two-dimensional) *zinnfiguren* by a number of German workshops opened the way for the casting of large numbers of figures in a scale that was small enough to manipulate. Thus was born the modern toy soldier.<sup>8</sup>

We will return to the issue of play below, but let us first consider the utility of these early toy soldiers to the princes for whom they were made after they had grown up. Just as Roman emperors had savored their triumphs on the battlefield by seeing them reenacted in the Colosseum, so rulers such as Frederick the Great were able to act them out on palace tabletops so as, on the one hand, to empha-

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<sup>8</sup> For all this, see Henry Harris, *Model Soldiers* (London: Octopus Books, 1972), 5–12.

size their own prowess and, on the other, to revel in military success. Though no examples are known from the eighteenth century, from here it was but a small step to the construction of permanent models that captured moments of military glory for posterity, the most obvious examples being William Siborne's two dioramas of the Battle of Waterloo, these currently being on show at the Royal Armouries in Leeds and the National Army Museum in London (an interesting side issue is exactly what such dioramas should represent: the larger of the two Siborne dioramas shows the situation on the battlefield at the climactic moment represented by the attack of the Old Guard, and, according to the admittedly highly partisan Peter Hofschröder, it originally included far more Prussian figures than is currently the case, Siborne supposedly having had to remove a large number of Prussians as a result of pressure to conform with the Duke of Wellington's claims that Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher and his men only really came to grips with the French after the battle had been won by his own Army of the Netherlands).<sup>9</sup> Not to be outdone, perhaps, the French also made use of dioramas as a means of projecting their own claims to heroism, the Musée de l'Armée housing a large collection of dioramas depicting the battles of the Napoleonic age using, ironically enough, German flats.<sup>10</sup> And, finally, in the

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<sup>9</sup> For the background to the Siborne dioramas and the controversies to which they gave rise, see Peter Hofschröder, *Wellington's Smallest Victory: The Duke, the Model-Maker and the Secret of Waterloo* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004). In later periods, dioramas have been made use of purposes that were still more overtly political. In the 1930s, for example, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany named Otto Gottstein, who had been an avid collector of the flat *zinnfiguren* that had been the norm in Germany until the early twentieth century, commissioned a series of models depicting such events as the Charge of the Light Brigade that were evidently intended to inflame the martial spirit of the British people in the face of German aggression, while the bicentenary of the Peninsular War has seen the construction of numerous dioramas in which the Spanish Army has attempted to combat the myth that the only Spaniards who fought the French were the guerrillas. Yet another example is the diorama of the Battle of Borodino that appeared in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad in 1938: with war against Germany looming, the heroic resistance offered to Napoléon's forces was an obvious subject for emulation. Finally, such latter-day examples as the enormous Waterloo diorama on prominent display at the Rifles Museum at Winchester, UK, takes us right back to Siborne or, more particularly, the desire of the British Army to commemorate its heroes.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, *Model Soldiers*, 40. In the interwar period, a military museum at Compiègne also saw the unveiling of a 30-yard-square Waterloo diorama depicting the great French cavalry attack. Harris, *Model Soldiers*.

United States, the museum of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, has a large diorama of the climax of the attack of General George E. Pickett's division at the Battle of Gettysburg, a moment that could be claimed by sympathizers with the Union and Confederacy alike as the very epitome of glory.<sup>11</sup>

If too obvious to ignore, the Siborne example is perhaps not the best one to cite here in that it was not the work of the establishment but rather that of an officer who had missed out on Waterloo and never quite escaped from the sensation that he had failed to do his part. Exhibiting his models certainly carried with it the hope that he might make some money, but they were also instilled with a desperate desire both to identify with the men of Waterloo and to sing their praises. In short, there is a desire to belong, to fit in, to imagine the scene, that can be found, to quote Wilfred Owen, in every "child eager for some desperate glory" (the word *child*, it may here be supposed, is one that is subject to a certain elasticity). As one rather hostile commentator has written, "War toys . . . do not supply any basic human need, but are desired because they promise to give satisfaction to a sense that something is lacking in the subject's notion of his/her identity."<sup>12</sup> Well, perhaps. But this in turn led to still another development in the notion of acting out battles with model soldiers as a means of stimulating the imagination or basking in the gleam of distant trumpets. As early as the 1760s, Laurence Sterne featured this pastime in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, while in a letter from Lieutenant Colonel Henry Torrens, then military secretary at the Horse Guards, to Wellington dated 19 August 1813, we find the following: "Your godson, who is one of the finest boys in England, fights your battles over with his painted soldiers."<sup>13</sup>

Well before the Battle of Waterloo, then, model soldiers were a known cultural artifact. Whether any were produced in actual commemoration of the battle is unknown—in Britain, at least, almost no

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<sup>11</sup> Harris, *Model Soldiers*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Bignell, "The Meanings of War Toys and Wargames," in *War, Culture, and the Media: Representations of the Military in 20th-Century Britain*, ed. Ian Stewart and Susan L. Carruthers (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 180.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Torrens to Lord Wellington, 19 August 1813, WP/1-1244, General correspondence and memoranda, 1790–1832, Wellington Papers, 1/374, Special Collections, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK.



figures survive from the period prior to the Crimean War—but toy manufacturers certainly were quick to cash in on their potential. In 1817, a board game was published in London called *The Battle of Waterloo, or the British Game of Chess*, while 1842 saw the publication of a cardboard toy theater that allowed children to act out not the usual traditional pantomimes but rather a play based on the battle that had recently been showing in London.<sup>14</sup> That said, it was a very long time before the idea of fighting the Battle of Waterloo, or, for that matter, any other campaign in the Napoleonic period, with anything other than the most representational of figures became remotely possible: though toy soldiers began to be produced in large numbers and at affordable prices from the 1890s onward—the key company in Britain was the famous firm Britain's, just as in Germany it was Heyde and in France Mignot—the soldiers of Napoléon, Wellington, and the rest were not represented in any quantity, while even if they had been, the sort of figure scales that were the norm—54 millimeters (mm) in the case of Britain's—were not really suitable to such projects. In any case, what mattered was not so much the past, how-

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<sup>14</sup> Spotted by my good friend and colleague, Rory Muir, a leaflet relating to the former may be found in the British Library, while the latter is pictured in one of the illustrations to R. E. Foster, *Wellington and Waterloo: The Duke, the Battle and Posterity, 1815–2015* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2014). The author also has a facsimile of a pack of playing cards dating from the period of the battle that feature depictions of the British, French, Prussian, and Russian armies. It is worth pointing out that from time to time the toy industry has produced very simple board games that are based on the Hundred Days but offer little in the way of strategic or historical analysis. One such is *The Battle of Waterloo*. Produced by Palitoy in 1975, this featured stylized red and blue plastic playing pieces that advanced and retreated along simple event tracks that crisscrossed the board—a stylized map of the battlefield—from one side to the other, a casualty being removed from the enemy array every time a figure reached the end of one of said tracks. See “The Battle of Waterloo,” BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 28 August 2014. Seventy years before, Parker Brothers had produced a simple strategic-level game called *Waterloo Campaign*, 1815, which featured a schematic map of the area between Paris and Brussels across which the rival armies moved from town to town by means of preset pathways. See “Waterloo,” BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 28 August 2012. Finally, there is the well-known Waddington's game, *Campaign*. A strategic game that first appeared in the early 1970s fought out over a stylized map of Napoleonic-epoch Europe by armies of identical size and composition, this would be of no interest at all in this context were it not for the fact that the Dutch version was renamed *Waterloo*. See “Campaign,” BoardGameGeek.com.

ever heroic, but the present.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as catalog after catalog reveals, the mainstay of production was constituted by soldiers of whichever country the companies concerned represented arrayed in dress uniform. Battles were fought in plenty, certainly (it is no coincidence that the first wargame books to be published in Britain date from the Edwardian period), but, at least in Britain, the scene was invariably Africa or Asia: to invest too much significance in the matter would be absurd, but, future high priest of imperialism as he was, the young Winston Churchill had a massive collection of toy soldiers and used regularly to mow down hordes of unfortunate Zulus, Sudanese, and Afghans in the nursery of Blenheim Palace. As one commentator has remarked, “To collect or play with toy soldiers was to invest in Empire; it was also to sanitise Victorian Britain’s violent and repressive overseas wars into bloodless struggles between models.”<sup>16</sup> Nor was it only British imperialists who engaged in such fantasies: in line with their seventeenth-century forebears, Nicholas II of Russia, Wilhelm II of Germany, and Alfonso XIII of Spain all had large collections of the figures produced by current commercial manufacturers.<sup>17</sup>

With the coming of the First World War, the “steadfast tin soldier” found himself more in action than ever, and, what is more, brought right up to date. Thus, Britain’s and its rival foreign manu-

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<sup>15</sup> There were exceptions to this tendency. By the late nineteenth century, the flat-based German company, Heinrichsen, was producing ranges depicting the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, and the Russo-Turkish War, these being joined in the first years of the twentieth century by figures for the Boer and Russo-Japanese conflicts. Harris, *Model Soldiers*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Kozacka, “Symbolism and Empire: Stevenson, Scott, and Toy Soldiers,” in *The Land of Story-Books: Scottish Children’s Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. S. Dunnigan and Shu-Fang Lai (Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Literature International, 2019), 181. See also Kenneth D. Brown, “Modelling for War?: Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (April 1990): 237–54, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh/24.2.237>. For a guide to the Britain’s range, see James Opie, *Britain’s Toy Soldiers: The History and Handbook, 1893–2013* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2016). In Germany, the trend was not so much to revel in colonial triumphs as, first, to relive the glory of such episodes as the *befreiungskrieg* of 1813 and the Franco-Prussian War, and second, to take advantage of whatever opportunity offered itself to thumb their nose at the British, in which respect see Euan Loarridge, “War through the Eyes of the Toy Soldier: A Material Study of the Legacy and Impact of Conflict, 1880–1945,” *Critical Military Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 2021): 367–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2019.1659626>.

<sup>17</sup> Harris, *Model Soldiers*, 12–14.

facturers swapped production from figures in the colorful uniforms of prewar days to the drab khaki, field-grey, and horizon-blue of the trenches. In the somewhat sententious words of authors Ruth Larsen and Ian Whitehead, “Toy manufacturers created miniaturized replicas of battle-sites . . . which were sold openly to children. . . . By encouraging the sale of military . . . toys, a romantic, playful view of war was engendered, and so . . . children were conditioned to war through their playtime.”<sup>18</sup> If this view is a trifle jaundiced, not least because it ignores the agency of the market, and, more specifically, the children themselves, what is certainly true is that in Nazi Germany toy soldiers were conscripted into the drive for rearmament, the Hausser company producing a huge range of figures molded in a compound of plaster of Paris and sawdust known as elastolin, representing every conceivable branch of the German Army, and, equally, that, in Britain, Britain’s made a small gesture toward countering the public’s fear of air raids by bringing out a detailed model of anti-aircraft battery whose gun—inevitably, the centerpiece of the set—was accompanied by a positive cornucopia of technological aids of all sorts; notwithstanding the famously gloomy claim of the British prime minister Stanley Baldwin then, the bomber would not always get through.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, in terms of how the figures concerned were actually manipulated, little changed, what made a difference in this respect being the new consumer society ushered in by the end of the Second World War. With living standards soaring in Western Europe, there was a growing demand for toys that were more sophisticated, satisfying, and, indeed, educational, and manufacturers were not slow to step into the breach. Cheap train sets, cheap model cars, cheap dolls, and, yes, cheap model soldiers were soon pouring onto the shelves, and, in Britain at least (the American equivalent was the one-man operation of Jack Scruby), extremely prominent in this last category were

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<sup>18</sup> Ruth Larsen and Ian Whitehead, eds., *Popular Experience and Cultural Representation of the Great War, 1914–1918* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 58.

<sup>19</sup> The figures were manufactured under the name Elastolin and it is by that they are generally remembered. For the products of the Hausser company, meanwhile, see Reggie Polaine and David Hawkins, *The War Toys I: The Story of Elastolin-Hausser* (London: New Cavendish Books, 1991). For Britain’s anti-aircraft battery, meanwhile, see Loarridge, “War through the Eyes of the Toy Soldier,” 379.

the sets produced by two companies: the ever-famous Airfix and the less well-known Spencer-Smith. Being made of plastic and, more importantly, comparatively small—Airfix figures came in at 20 mm and Spencer-Smith ones at 25 mm—the products of these two companies revolutionized the situation and effectively made wargaming with model soldiers a practical pursuit. In at the very beginning were a number of pioneers—key names were Don Featherstone, Tony Bath, Charles Grant, and the decorated war hero Brigadier Peter Young—and together these enthusiasts managed to launch a bandwagon that has never ceased to roll until the present day. Armies were mobilized and painted, model railway shops raided for scenery, little groups of like-minded enthusiasts got together to form wargame clubs, sets of rules written and even books and magazines published, and the net result was that by the mid-1960s the hobby had grown to such dimensions that, by the age of eight or thereabouts, the current author (whose every waking hour was spent playing with what his increasingly exasperated mother called his “little men”) was able to walk into his local library and find a librarian who had actually heard of the subject!<sup>20</sup>

Curiously, however, despite its obvious attractions, the Napoleonic epoch did not figure very strongly in this great upsurge of activity, the central reason for this being that the figures to make it possible remained, if not unavailable, then at least very expensive: thus, while a number of specialist manufacturers of wargames figures—the most prominent were Hinton Hunt and Miniature Figurines—were now making figures that were compatible with Airfix and Spencer-Smith in terms of their size, figures, moreover, that included large numbers of Napoleonic troop-types; they were doing so in white metal with the result that the cost was considerable. Not surprisingly, then, most figure gamers concentrated on either the

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<sup>20</sup> Early wargaming manuals include Donald F. Featherstone, *War Games: Battles and Manoeuvres with Model Soldiers* (London: Stanley Paul, 1962); Brig P. Young and LtCol J. P. Lawford, *Charge! or How to Play War Games* (London: Morgan Grampain, 1967); John Tunstill, *Discovering Wargames* (Tring, UK: Shire Publications, 1969); Terence Wise, *Introduction to Battle Gaming* (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Model and Allied Publications, 1969); and Charles Grant, *Battle! Practical Wargaming* (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Model and Allied Publications, 1970). For a general survey of a slightly more up-to-date vintage, see George Gush and Andrew Finch, *A Guide to Wargaming* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

American Civil War, the Second World War, or the Seven Years' War, these being the periods for which the most complete ranges of plastic figures were available.<sup>21</sup>

However, all was not well in the wargaming world. If there was one period that fascinated its denizens more than World War Two, it was the Napoleonic Wars: if the former had its Alameins and Stalingrads, its Pattons and its Rommels, and its fascinating array of tanks and aircraft, the latter could hit back with a virtuoso display of titanic struggles, military geniuses, and, if not innovative military hardware, then at least some of the most spectacular uniforms ever to grace a parade ground. The result, needless to say, was much frustration, so much so, indeed, that desperate enthusiasts went to unbelievably time-consuming lengths to convert readily available figures of all sorts to Napoleonic troops.<sup>22</sup> What changed matters was probably the release in 1970 of the Dino De Laurentis film *Waterloo*. At all events, it was just a few months before this event that Airfix brought out the first sets in a new range of Battle of Waterloo figures. Truly, this was a seminal moment. Initially, the range was not very big—for a considerable time, it included only Scottish highlanders on the one side and French cuirassiers on the other, a combination which, ironically enough, never came to blows at Waterloo—while the quality of

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<sup>21</sup> By far the best guide to the growth of the plastic wargames figure is constituted by PlasticSoldierReview.com, accessed 25 August 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Robert C. Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 1: Anglo-Dutch Infantry," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 4 (December 1970): 200–201; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 2: Anglo-Dutch Infantry," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 5 (January 1971): 240–41; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 3," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 6 (February 1971): 318–19; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 4: Anglo-Dutch Cavalry," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 7 (March 1971): 347; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 5," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 8 (April 1971): 402–3; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 6," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 10 (May 1971): 456–57; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 7: The Prussians," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 10 (June 1971): 541–42; Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 8," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 11 (July 1971): 571, 593; and Gibson, "1815: Modeling the Armies of the Napoleonic Era for Wargames—Part 9: French Artillery," *Airfix Magazine* 12, no. 1 (August 1971): 632. Such conversions were not just painstaking but painful: to this day, the author's fingers bear the scars inflicted by clumsily wielded modeling knives!

some of the sets was extremely poor in terms of molding and historical accuracy, but gradually the types of figure available increased to nine: French Old Guard, line infantry, line artillery, and cuirassiers; British Highlanders, line infantry, hussars, and horse artillery; and Prussian *landwehr*. To complement the range, after a few years there appeared a kit of the crucial farmhouse of La Haye Sainte, while a number of wargames authors produced manuals on the Napoleonic period that contained not only sets of rules, but also potted histories of the various campaigns and large amounts of information on such matters as uniforms, weapons, tactics, and formations.<sup>23</sup>

Thanks to Airfix, then, Napoleonic wargaming had finally arrived, while, thanks to Airfix again, many seeds were sown that were to bear considerable fruit in the future: many and furious were the refights that took place of the fighting around La Haye Sainte on the author's bedroom floor, while more than one of his contemporaries in the field of Napoleonic history is quite prepared to admit that it was those same boxes of cream-colored plastic figures that first sparked off their interest in the period.<sup>24</sup> To this day, the tradition has continued. Thanks to the successive arrival on the scene of new manufacturers—Revell, Emhar, Esci, Italeri, Odemars, Strelets, Zvezda, HAT—virtually every troop-type that was present at Waterloo can

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<sup>23</sup> See Charles Grant, *Napoleonic Wargaming* (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Model and Allied Publications, 1973); and Bruce Quarrie, *Napoleonic Wargaming*, Airfix Magazine Guide 4 (Cambridge, UK: Patrick Stephens, 1974).

<sup>24</sup> To save the blushes that might result, the author will not name names insofar as the historical community is concerned, but some of the excitement generated among many young boys of a historical bent is captured in an article by veteran wargamer Gary Kitching: "For young gamers of the time, it gave rise to a passion that stayed with them to the present day. . . . No matter how many obstacles were placed in our way, like the stoic British Guards at Waterloo, we persevered." Gary Kitching, "Waterloo Obsession," *Wargames Illustrated Waterloo 2015 Special* (hereafter, *WIWS*), 3–4. Very similar are the recollections voiced by Jon Bleasdale: "I can recall walking home from school one day in 1970 and seeing incredible posters up on billboards advertising the new 'Waterloo' film. I saw the film with friends and that, combined with Airfix releasing their Napoleonic sets and my newfound hobby of wargaming, started a desire to play this battle. I had no idea at the time how I was going to play it. My collection of Airfix. . . . Highlanders and Cuirassiers somehow fell short!" Jon Bleasdale, "The Battle of Waterloo in 6mm Part 1," *Grymauch's Solo Wargaming Blog*, accessed 1 July 2020. In the United States, meanwhile, playing with toy soldiers—in this case, those of the manufacturer Marx—had a similar effect with regard to interest in the Civil War. See Mannie Gentile, "Campaigns of the Imagination," *Civil War Times* 53, no. 5 (October 2014): 46–51.

now be represented in plastic form on the tabletop, while it is also possible to purchase personality figures such as Napoléon, Wellington, Blücher, Marshal Michel Ney, and Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Picton.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, too, at least one manual has appeared specifically relating to refighting Waterloo in the form of Charles Grant's *Waterloo: Wargaming in History* (1990), the result being that it can be assumed that here and there children will undoubtedly be found acting out the same scenes that were so characteristic of the author's childhood, just as so many of their predecessors from the halcyon years of the late 1960s and early 1970s continue to fight out the battles of their youth, even if they have now graduated to the metal figures that the pocket money of their school days could not begin to finance.<sup>26</sup>

However, to say that Waterloo is wargamed on the tabletop is one thing, and to say that it was actually refought quite another. Such are the practical difficulties involved—the sheer number of figures that would be needed is but the most prominent example—that the project has not been tried out very often. To quote Donald Featherstone:

The idea of refighting the famous battles of history . . . is a most attractive proposition. Unfortunately it is almost impossible to put into practice with any degree of accuracy. . . . These battles involved thousands of soldiers fighting over vast areas of ground. At the battle of Waterloo, there were [72,000] French, 68,000 British, Dutch, Belgians and Germans and more than 100,000 Prussians. Even drastically scaling down this number so that 100 men on the battlefield approximate to one man on the wargames table gives ludicrous infantry battalions of about seven or eight men [while] the wargamer will still need about 3,000 model soldiers!

<sup>25</sup> For a complete list, see “Periods: Napoleonic Wars,” *PlasticSoldierReview.com*, accessed 23 February 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Grant, *Waterloo: Wargaming in History* (New York: Sterling Publishers, 1990). Of the original companies manufacturing metal figures, only Miniature Figurines survives. As revered as it is, this last has over the years been joined by a host of other manufacturers. These have come and gone, but at any one time many dozens are in business, while, from the 1970s onward, figures have appeared in a number of smaller scales—15 mm, 10 mm, 6 mm—that offer obvious advantages in terms of cost and storage, not to mention the amount of space needed actually to fight tabletop battles.

## *The History and Development of Wargames*

Waterloo was a relatively small battle for the number of troops involved, yet it stretched across a frontage of . . . four miles, and, even with a vastly reduced ground scale, an unreasonably large wargames table would be required to reconstruct it.<sup>27</sup>

As we shall see, the logistical problems highlighted by Featherstone did not dissuade a succession of miniatures enthusiasts, including, indeed, his good self, from trying their hand at the project, but, even if the necessary armies could be purchased and painted up, the whole exercise was undermined by a series of problems that were inherent to the use of miniatures. First of the many difficulties here is the issue of the relationship between figure scale and ground scale. Let us take the typical wargames figure that is in use today. Standing 15 mm tall, he may therefore be judged as being cast on a scale of 2.5 mm to 1 foot, while the buildings, bridges, trees, and stone walls among which he operates are built with proportions to match. However, unless the intention is to recreate tiny skirmishes—Wild West gunfights, say—or to reproduce small parts of a given battle—the obvious possibility pertaining to Waterloo would be the defense of La Haye Sainte—the ground scale is invariably quite different, most wargamers using a scale of 1 mm to 1 yard or 1 inch to 25 yards. The resultant telescoping of distance is abundantly necessary if actions of any size are to be fitted on the tabletop (even ones as big as those employed by Peter Gilder, Iain Gale, and Tony Pollard), but, in terms of figures and scenery alike, its effects are very odd indeed. Thus, at 1 mm to 1 yard, our 15-mm figure now becomes a giant standing 15 yards high, while he occupies a space perhaps 6 yards square. Height-wise, the problem can be elided, but horizontal distance is another matter. Each tin soldier, obviously enough, can be said to stand for a certain number of men—in the case of the refight just described, the stipulation was

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<sup>27</sup> Donald F. Featherstone, *Battle Notes for Wargamers* (Newton Abbot, UK: Crescent Publishing, 1973), 9. The pages that follow concentrate on refights that were essentially corporate efforts. However, there are a few recorded instances of individuals who have literally dedicated their lives to recreating the battles as individuals. See, for example, “Miniature Waterloo 1970,” [Hand-Painted-Soldiers.com](http://Hand-Painted-Soldiers.com); and Bleasdale, “The Battle of Waterloo in 6 mm Part 1,” both accessed 3 June 2020. Astonishingly, there is even an American enthusiast who has recreated the three armies that fought at Waterloo on a scale of 1:1 using 5-mm figures. See “6mm Armies for Waterloo,” *WIWS*, 67–72.



33—while it can also be assumed that each model tree actually represents an area of woodland 40–50 yards across. However, the built environment is another matter entirely. Narrow country lanes suddenly become motorways, hump-backed bridge structures akin to those spanning the Thames in central London, and narrow streams veritable River Mersey ship canals. As for the beautifully finished models of Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte that graced many of the tabletops concerned, a moment’s thought is sufficient to realize that they cover areas the size of substantial housing estates. Finally, as if all this was not enough, we come to the question of the visual representation of Napoleonic armies. Let us here forget the fact that most figure manufacturers persist in casting their products in full dress uniform in defiance of a reality that was much less sartorially elegant, a concomitant of this being that wargamers naturally want to include as many different units as possible in their forces. As the knock-on effect of this is that units are likely to be small, we move on here to the far more serious issue of what they look like in terms of their physical proportions. In all his many years as a wargamer, the current author has never encountered a set of rules that suggested anything more than around 50 figures for an infantry battalion, and yet even this delivers units that, man-for-man, are less than one-tenth the size of the units they seek to model, and the net result is a visual impression that is wholly unrealistic, not to say misleading.<sup>28</sup> In latter years, the situation in the wargames world has moved on and there are now two manufacturers who produce large ranges of regimental blacks in 2-mm scale that can be acquired very cheaply and deployed in huge numbers to recreate entire divisions or corps down to the last man, while yet avoiding the problems that have been outlined above with regard to scenery. By using rules that reduce all tactical encounters to the level of abstraction and rather concentrate on the brigade or divisional level, the use of such figures makes staging Waterloo and

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<sup>28</sup> The obvious solution to the problems presented by traditional miniatures games is to reduce the scope of the action to one small sector of the battlefield only. So far as the author is aware, few such attempts have ever been made, but one game of this sort was organized in 2015 by the Lee-on-Solent wargames club, this recreating the struggle around Hougoumont alone at a scale of one model soldier to three real men (a ratio that in the end led to them fielding some 4,500 figures). See Chris Gregg, “West Country Waterloo at 1:3 Scale: Hougoumont Report, and Rules Available to Download,” *Not Just Old-School Wargaming*, accessed 3 June 2020.

other such actions a far more practical possibility, but it is extremely unlikely that they will ever supersede the larger scales: for most miniature gamers, the spectacle offered by their masses of lovingly painted figures, each and every one of whom is recognizably an individual, is indispensable.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, there is the issue of emotional satisfaction: after all, watching the last square of the Old Guard being shot to pieces move by move is infinitely more emotive than merely, say, removing a cardboard counter from a map or seeing an icon disappear from a computer screen. As Richard Yarwood has written, “While video games are doubtless played enthusiastically and immersively by networks of players, the imaginative boundaries and features of games are determined by software companies and games consoles. Miniature wargames, by contrast, allow greater opportunities for more creative acts of self-expression through the collection, painting and organisation of model armies and the writing of rules to control them.”<sup>30</sup> Added to this, meanwhile, are myriad possibilities for social interaction: though wargaming can be an activity engaged in alone—indeed, sometimes has to be engaged in alone for want of suitable interlocutors—it is at its most rewarding when engaged in within the context of a like-minded group. As the same author continues, “Players engage with each other. Miniatures become vehicles for sociability through performances of play.”<sup>31</sup>

To return to the caveats laid out above, the undeniable fact of their existence does not make wargaming with miniatures of no use as a historical exercise. On the contrary, given sets of rules that are properly constructed—a caveat that, it has to be said, is extremely important—the activity is by no means a bad way of exploring the mechanics of the Napoleonic battle: gamers who do not already know such things very quickly discover that sending skirmishers out to fight cavalry, deploying unsupported cavalry against infantry in square, and trying to smash through British lines with unsupport-

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<sup>29</sup> The manufacturers concerned are Irregular Miniatures and Paperbattles.com (no longer active). The latter even manufactured a complete Battle of Waterloo game (at one time; currently said company’s website appears to be defunct).

<sup>30</sup> Richard Yarwood, “Miniaturisation and the Representation of Military Geographies in Recreational Wargaming,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 16, no. 6 (September 2015): 660, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2014.1001430>.

<sup>31</sup> Yarwood, “Miniaturisation and the Representation of Military Geographies in Recreational Wargaming,” 665.

ed columns of *fantassins* (French foot soldiers) are all bad ideas.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the physical removal from the tabletop of large numbers of figures serves as a very real reminder of the human cost of war. As Featherstone has written, “It is doubtful whether wargames will ever give one profound military insight, but the wargamer may gain an understanding of the problems of the commanders in the field and a glimpse of the military thinking of the time.”<sup>33</sup> On occasion, too, replaying particular incidents such as the attack of the Old Guard can sometimes help to explain how particular incidents happened, while Arthur Harman, a figure closely connected to the innovative circle centered on Paddy Griffith, developed a mechanism for exploring the experiences of a typical British infantry battalion holding the line on Mont Saint-Jean (for some further thoughts on this approach, see chapter 3).<sup>34</sup> Yet, in the end, so great are the problems with the figure game, that it is evident that some other medium is needed, at which point enter the board wargame, this being something that may be defined as a battle or campaign, usually but not always historical, that is fought out on a map according to a specially written set of rules using cardboard, plastic, or metal counters. As such, this is, of course, a product that takes us right back to the principles of kriegsspiel, and in 1975 Airfix actually produced Waterloo Wargame, which appears to have been based very closely on the ideas of Reisswitz. The rules, admittedly, were much simpler, but the units—plastic blocks surmounted by a single Airfix figure of an appropriate type—maneuvered over a large vinyl map, while, exactly

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<sup>32</sup> Wargames rules are, of course, a human construct and therefore something that is as vulnerable as anything else to human frailty. For example, a rule writer who is a fan of the famous “95th Rifles” (95th Regiment of Foot) might give them firepower of a level equivalent to the “mad minute” of 1914 vintage, just as an admirer of Napoléon might give French cuirassiers a good chance of breaking British squares.

<sup>33</sup> Featherstone, *Battle Notes for Wargamers*, 10. For an excellent study of the manner in which generic battles of the type fought by most wargamers can be highly instructive in respect of the lessons of history, see Grant, *Wargame Tactics*.

<sup>34</sup> Barry van Danzig, “How Wargaming Solved Some Historical Mysteries from Waterloo,” *WIWS*, 38–49; and Arthur Harman, “Hard Pounding: A Game of a British infantry battalion’s experience of Waterloo,” *Miniature Wargames* no. 45 (February 1987): 42–44. What makes Harman’s game all the more interesting is that the French are not represented in the flesh but are rather essentially an abstract presence that inflicts casualties by artillery and skirmisher fire; more than that, indeed, instead of model soldiers, the British infantry can be represented just as well by red Lego bricks.

as in kriegsspiel, their moves were measured by a special pair of calipers.<sup>35</sup> This product, however, was at first something of a one-off in terms of the history of wargaming Waterloo, the board wargame having for the previous 15 years or more been developing according to a very different trajectory.<sup>36</sup> We come here in the first instance to the American company Avalon Hill. Founded in 1952 by a businessman from a railway background named Charles Roberts, this company made its debut by publishing an abstract battlegame called Tactics, but within a few years it had embarked on the development of an ever-increasing number of games based on historical battles and campaigns that pioneered a series of features and mechanisms that have been standard in the field of board wargaming ever since. In brief, after a somewhat shaky start involving the use of a squared battlefield, Roberts's games featured a detailed map overlaid with a hexagonal grid—an idea derived from a technique used by the U.S. Army—that defined the precise position of each unit at any given time and also governed movement.<sup>37</sup> It also included cardboard counters printed

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<sup>35</sup> The author having been fortunate enough to acquire a copy at the time of the bicentenary of the battle, he can report that as a game it is not a success, being far too restrictive in terms of the number of units players can move each turn, not to mention very conservative in terms of speed of maneuver. That said, suitably customized, it is an excellent centerpiece for a seminar discussion. For some basic details, see “Waterloo Wargame,” BoardGameGeek.com; and “Airfix Waterloo Wargame,” Dioramas, Scenery and Wargaming, Airfix Tribute Forum, accessed 28 August 2014.

<sup>36</sup> In recent years, at least three games have appeared that have returned to the Reisswitz model in the form of Command Post Games' engagingly named Pub Battles: Waterloo, Trafalgar Editions' Waterloo, 1815: The Last Battle of Napoleon, and Pendragon Games Studio's Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes, in all of which counters maneuver over attractive period-style maps of the actual battlefields. See “Waterloo,” CommandPostGames.com; and “Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes,” BoardGameGeek.com, both accessed 4 June 2020.

<sup>37</sup> The use of wargaming by the military is a separate subject of great complexity and is not addressed in these pages. Increasingly common from the middle of the nineteenth century, thanks to the spread of kriegsspiel, it featured in the elaboration of the Schlieffen Plan and was widely employed in both the interwar period and the Second World War. By this time, however, the Reisswitz systems were looking increasingly dated, and the result was a move to more visual systems in which grids of various sorts were superimposed on maps to allow the position of units and the moves open to them to be exactly charted (if the hexagon eventually won out over the more traditional square, it was because it allowed movement in six directions rather than just four, while at the same time getting around the problem of diagonal movement inherent in the use of squares, namely, the fact that units moving diagonally can move farther and faster than those confined to moving in the four cardinal directions). For a discus-

with a variety of information relating to the units they represented (typically, the identity and type of the unit concerned, the number of hexagons they were allowed to move each turn, and their value in combat, a figure that might be different according to whether the situation was one of attack or defense); an odds-based combat-results table; the use of dice-throws to simulate the effect of chance; and, finally, the notion of *zones of control*, an area of ground contiguous to each unit that the enemy could not enter without attacking the unit concerned and could not exit without first having driven off or, still better, destroyed, said enemy.<sup>38</sup>

During the seven decades or more since the publication of Tactics, Roberts's ideas have spread far and wide. Dozens of manufacturers have appeared along with a range of magazines discussing alternative concepts of games design and different approaches to recreating particular battles, and, in many instances, offering a complete game in every issue, while, if manufacturers and magazines alike have in many cases disappeared after anything ranging from a couple of years to a couple of decades, there have always been newcomers keen to step into the breach. Coverage, meanwhile, has burgeoned: in the early days, the choice was limited to operational-level simulations of such well-known episodes of military history as Operation Barbarossa, D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and, yes, the Hundred Days, but games can now be obtained based on virtually every battle in history from Kadesh onward, including plenty that remain purely hypothetical (mercifully so in the case of those that periodically examined the cataclysm of a war between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact or, for that matter, Russia and China).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, diversification has not just been a matter of

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sion of the "professional" wargame, see James F. Dunnigan, *The Complete Wargames Handbook: How to Play, Design, and Find Them* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 234–64; and John Prados, *Pentagon Games: Wargames and the American Military* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> It is quite impossible to explain the workings of board wargames in a brief footnote. However, readers interested in the subject are referred to Nicholas Palmer, *The Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming* (London: Hippocrene Books, 1977); and Palmer, *The Best of Board Wargaming* (London: Hippocrene Books, 1980).

<sup>39</sup> It is not just that there is a wider choice of period, campaign, or battle: on the contrary, if Waterloo has been revisited on many different occasions, the same is true of many other clashes.

period, for, if the counters in many games continue to represent the traditional brigades, divisions, or even corps, in others they rather stand for battalions, companies, squads, or even individuals. Finally, from beginnings that were schematic in the extreme, thanks to an ever-greater engagement with both the historical evidence and the secondary literature, there has also been a move toward greater authenticity in terms of orders of battle and combat performance alike, so much so, indeed, that the spate of wargames modelling clashes between NATO and the Warsaw Pact that appeared in the uncomfortably hot latter years of the Cold War were reportedly seized on with great avidity by the Russian Army.<sup>40</sup>

For a good example of the extent to which game designers can ponder the past, American designer Mark Herman comments on the thought processes that governed his classification of the rival armies that faced one another on the battlefield of Waterloo:

Breaking with tradition, I have shown Wellington's army to be of higher quality than other games have rated them in the past. As this is a corps-level simulation each of the British [*sic*] corps are a mixture of British regulars, German allies and Dutch units . . . Each of the British [*sic*] corps had British infantry divisions aligned with Allied troops, but one would expect that I would lower [their] . . . quality based on the perception that the . . . Netherland divisions and German [auxiliaries] were inferior. . . . However, if you take a fresh look at . . . the performance of the Second Netherlands division at Quatre Bras, [you find that] they managed to hold the line against an escalating French attack until they were overwhelmed. I am hard pressed to represent this as inferior performance. In the end it appears to me that the British corps [*sic*] were not materially diluted . . . by the Allied troops, and I rated these [last] units on their superior performance in this campaign compared to [that of] their French opponents.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Dunnigan, *The Complete Wargames Handbook*, 169. According to some accounts, the Gulf War of 1991 was actually planned using a commercial board wargame titled Gulf Strike.

<sup>41</sup> Waterloo Campaign, 1815 rule book, 23.

There will, of course, be those who disagree with this decision, but that is immaterial. On the contrary, the point is rather that, at their best, game designers are thoughtful, intelligent, and widely read individuals who are deeply immersed in the study of their subjects. As Herman has written elsewhere, “I am ever mindful that wargames are meant primarily for entertainment. [However], for some of us, we cannot be entertained by a game if it does not meet our view of the historical narrative: for me it is essential that all of the major muscle movements that impacted the situation and decisions being made in the simulation are fully accounted for.”<sup>42</sup> By extension, meanwhile, their efforts can result in valuable research tools, even ways of engaging with certain aspects of the past that cannot be replicated by any other means. Philip Sabin, one of the foremost academic experts on the subject and the author of an important study on the use of wargames as a pedagogical aid, believes that “for a number of battles or campaigns, it is actually the case that the most detailed published treatment of at least some aspect of the engagement will be found, not in a book, but in a wargame.”<sup>43</sup> And, finally, there is an issue that changing fashions in the historical world have made extremely topical, namely, the way in which wargames represent their subject. As Finnish gamer V. P. J. Arponen has observed, “Film, literature and, indeed, gaming, reflect a culture’s way of viewing [its] history . . . and have long been intertwined in the . . . construction of topics like war, commemoration, heroism and more. As wargamers, we reproduce the tropes of our cultural surroundings, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously.”<sup>44</sup>

The board wargame, then, is far from being irrelevant in terms of the study of the past (one point that is particularly interesting in this respect is that surveys show that most games are played solo, the inference being that the motivation is not competition but rather the search for historical enlightenment). Yet, its existence has gone almost unremarked in the scholarly literature, while recognition of its

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Herman, “Distilling History to Its Essence or How to Make Wargames Moonshine,” *Czi Magazine* 2, no. 33 (2019): 31.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), xviii.

<sup>44</sup> V. P. J. Arponen, “‘Daddy, You Say You Don’t Like War, So Why Do You Play These Games?’” *Czi Magazine* 2, no. 33, (2019): 32.

value as a research tool there has been virtually none. There is Sabin's *Simulating War*, a work that goes so far as to include a number of games ready for readers to assemble and explore for themselves, while in the United States there have been a number of attempts to harness various sorts of strategy games to classroom teaching.<sup>45</sup> Yet, beyond this, references are minimal, slighting, or even nonexistent: for example, despite being subtitled *A History of War on Paper*, Philipp von Hilgers's study of wargaming through the ages contains not a single mention of Roberts's games and their numerous derivatives, while all that a recent article entitled "Gaming the Medieval Past"—essentially a discussion of how a form of committee wargame pioneered by the current author's late and much-lamented friend, Paddy Griffith, is employed to introduce students to the dramatic campaigns of 1016 and 1066—could bring itself to say on the subject was as follows: "Wargaming through board games is still immensely popular, even though the topics could often be more effectively managed through computer or computer-aided systems. For some, handling hundreds of small cardboard counters using weighty books of rules is still the epitome of gaming."<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, taking R. E. Foster's admirable *Wellington and Waterloo: The Duke, the Battle and Posterity, 1815–2015* (2014) as an example of a work that has looked at the cultural legacy of the battle, this omits it from its otherwise scintillating orbit altogether. Why, though, is this the case? The answers, alas, are not difficult to identify. In the first place, there is the negative image of the gamer, a person often stereotyped as white, male, middle-aged, socially challenged (in this respect it really does not help that the most important internet site dealing with the subject rejoices in the unfortunate name of BoardGameGeek.com) and,

<sup>45</sup> For example, Charlie Trimm, "War and Peace in Canaan: Connecting Geography with Political and Military Affairs in Ancient Israel through a Classroom Game," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 21, no. 4 (October 2018): 306–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12460>; Solomon K. Smith, "Pounding Dice into Musket Balls: Using Wargames to Teach the American Revolution," *History Teacher* 46, no. 4 (August 2013): 561–76; and Marvin B. Scott, *Games and Strategies for Teaching U.S. History* (Portland, ME: J. Weston Walch, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Matthew Bennett and Ryan Lavelle, "Gaming the Medieval Past," *Historian*, no. 144 (Winter/Spring 2020): 33. To be blunt, this remark is as ignorant as it is demeaning: while there are board gamers who enjoy wallowing in the sort of game that is hinted at here, several games in the current author's collection refigure the whole of the Waterloo campaign with a mere 20-odd counters and rule books of no more than eight pages.



still worse, a war enthusiast, the result of this being that those professional historians who appreciate its value are often reticent about introducing the subject for fear of being accused of frivolity or being politically incorrect. In the second place, there is the association of wargaming with military planning, some of it of a highly controversial nature, the idea, of course, being that to plan for a particular campaign is synonymous with wanting to bring that campaign about. In the third place, there is the way in which the term *wargame* has been adopted as a pejorative term in progressive circles, as witness, for example, the renowned nuclear-disarmament propaganda film of the same name and, indeed, the later thriller in which a teenage hacker comes within an ace of setting off a third world war. In the fourth place, there is the specialized nature of the product, games for the most part only being available from online dealers or magazines that cannot be bought in normal shops, little advertised outside the hobby press, and all too often absent from the shelves of research libraries. And, finally, in the fifth place, it has to be said that game designers, a group that also lack the cachet of being professional historians, in too many cases do little to make their efforts accessible to the wider public: very often rule systems that are actually comparatively simple and easy to assimilate are presented via the pages of a rule book completely lacking in images or diagrams and printed in the smallest font that could be managed. As Sabin concludes, then, "It is hardly surprising that the . . . niche activity of wargaming is so neglected and misunderstood."<sup>47</sup>

Yet, misunderstood it has been. Needless to say, the reality is much more complex than the stereotype. Thus, an interesting study of the nature of wargamers included in an encyclopedia of wargaming published by Jon Freeman in 1980 suggested that, if players are indeed largely men, their interest in playing wargames is far more complex than some manic desire to lose themselves in militaristic fantasies, while they fell into two distinct families, namely those who were interested above all in playing the games as games and those who were in one way or another fascinated by the history, the commanders, the strategy, and the weapons systems.<sup>48</sup> That being the

<sup>47</sup> Sabin, *Simulating War*, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Jon Freeman, *The Complete Book of Board Wargames* (New York: Fireside, 1980), 22-26.

case, sneering remarks about war toys are neither here nor there, what we see being, on the one hand, a desire to find a novel means of satisfying basic competitive instincts, and, on the other, an equally novel means of exploring why particular moments of history ended in the ways that they did. The motivation behind the first phenomenon is clear enough, but the second might require some elucidation. According to the same study,

the historian-gamer uses conflict simulations as an extremely concentrated source of information to fill the gaps left by his education. By playing with the variables of tactics and strategy, reinforcement and supply and timing and preparation, he can gain a unique insight into the crucial factors of an engagement . . . why the actual results of a battle or war came about and how they might have been altered.<sup>49</sup>

In short, a wargame can be a research tool as much as it can be a recreational artifact. As one leading designer has remarked, indeed,

“reading” games rather than playing them is quite common and always has been. Many gamers . . . buy them, but never play them. This does not mean that [the games] are not used. . . . The usual procedure is to lay out the map, examine the pieces, read the rules and scenarios, and perhaps place the [units] on the map, but that is generally as far as it goes. The player has been satisfied with experiencing the dramatic potential. By dramatic potential I mean how and to what limits the various elements of the game can be manipulated. . . . Books or films are . . . a linear rendering of what went on, so there is no potential for exercising this dynamic. A game, of course, is just the opposite: its elements are meant to be exercised, and a player will often do this in his head with the aid of [its] components.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Freeman, *The Complete Book of Board Wargames*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Dunnigan, *Complete Wargames Handbook*, 92.

Finally, veteran gamer, David Scott writes:

Popular military history by and large fails to provide much insight into even the most obvious of questions. . . . Writers play fast and loose with alternative-history propositions—the “ifs” and “hads”—without deigning to provide much analysis to substantiate their view. Let us look at a common example. It was the deluge on 17 June which cost Napoleon his throne, for if he could have begun the battle at 9 a.m. instead of 11.30, he would have swept Wellington from the field before the Prussians could have intervened. Given that even the victor admitted that Waterloo was a “damn nice thing”, it does seem likely that the result hinged on the late French start. More recently, historians of the battle have revised their views: perhaps the late start was not forced on Napoleon by the muddy ground, some claiming that the ground would not [have dried] out materially in a single morning, [but] rather [that] the French were not sufficiently deployed to attack before 11.30. All fascinating, but where is the analysis? How long does it take mud to dry in similar ground and atmospheric conditions? How long did it take the grand battery to arrive, and to deploy? Based on that, how early could it have been in position? How much longer could it have fired for? How many casualties did it cause? How many more might it have caused? Would these have been decisive? Each of these questions is susceptible to analysis, yet you will search in vain for this in the vast majority of popular histories. If you want answers then you are pretty well on your own. . . . If history is an argument without end, then military history is in many respects an argument which never begins. Which brings me, belatedly, to wargaming: one of the great attractions of this hobby for me is the potential it gives us to restart the argument—to examine what happened in the light of what might have been

expected to happen, and to tease out some lessons in so doing.<sup>51</sup>

To conclude, then, wargaming is a pursuit whose history stretches back into the remote past and yet is one that continues to have relevance today. Through the various tools and systems by which it operates, it permits the exploration of conflict not just in terms of the timeless and generic, but also the particular and period-specific, while, albeit in the context of a very narrow group—such research as has been conducted on the subject suggests that wargamers are overwhelmingly male, white, and middle-class—at the same time fulfilling a genuine social function. For all the reticence displayed in its respect by the academic community, there is therefore no shame in studying it, the relatively limited nature of the bibliography in fact being a matter of some surprise. If this work is limited to the events of June 1815, meanwhile, it is worth pointing out that, make though Waterloo does for the basis of an excellent case study, similar volumes could be produced in respect of many other battles and campaigns, not least because, for every would-be Napoléon anxious to storm Mont Saint-Jean, there is a would-be Robert E. Lee determined to take Cemetery Ridge and a would-be Harold Godwinson bent on repelling William the Conqueror from Senlac Hill. And, last but not least, let us not forget that tabletop gaming is also an act of commemoration. As well-known wargamer Philip Barker once said, “The dead of Waterloo are just as dead whether wargamed or not. If I were one of them, I would rather be wargamed than forgotten.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See “The Endless What If? A Review of Hexasim’s Waterloo 1815: Fallen Eagles,” Reviews, Forums, “Waterloo 1815: Fallen Eagles,” BoardGamesGeek.com, accessed 24 June 2020.

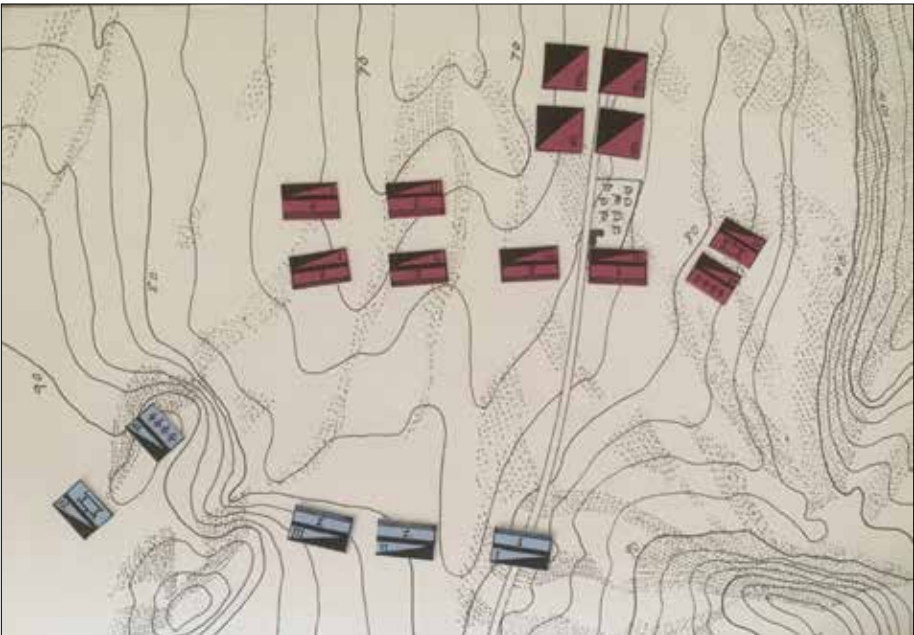
<sup>52</sup> Yarwood, “Miniaturisation and the Representation of Military Geographies,” 670.

## Chapter 1



*Author's collection, adapted by MCU Press*

France, Spain, Austria, and Prussia battle it out in the Waddington's game Campaign, a direct descendent of the strategy games produced by Hellwig and Venturini.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCU Press*

A kriegsspiel game in progress.

## The History and Development of Wargames



Left: Chinese chess laid out ready to play. Right: Hnefatafl, the first known attempt to simulate a real-life military situation.

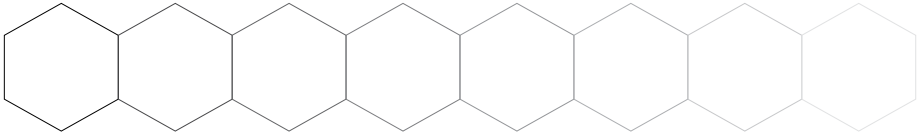


Armies of toy soldiers reminiscent of those gifted to many European princes in the eighteenth century arrayed for battle in the Parker Brothers' game Lionheart.

Chapter 1



*Author's collection, adapted by MCU Press*  
The Airfix Waterloo Wargame as customized by the author.



## *Chapter 2*

# The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle

It has been stated that the purpose of this work is not to provide yet another narrative account of Waterloo. That said, the author's purposes will not be served unless some insight is provided into his understanding of the battle, and all the more so given the fact that this last differs considerably from the received version of events that has tended to dominate the literature, as exemplified, for example, by the works of David Chandler. First, however, a few words may be in order with respect to the rapid campaign by which the titanic conflict of 18 June 1815 was preceded. In brief, having escaped from exile on the island of Elba off the coast of Italy, Napoléon once again seized power in France, only to be confronted by the military might of virtually the whole of Europe. Anxious to win an early victory that might shatter the resolution of his opponents and possibly even win the war at a stroke, the emperor decided to attack the enemy forces that lay nearest the frontiers of France, namely the Anglo-Dutch army of the Duke of Wellington and the Prussian forces of Field Marshal Blücher, both of which were stationed in Belgium. Adopting a central position designed to split their foes in twain and expose them to defeat in detail, the French crossed the border into Belgium on 15 June and succeeded in winning a substantial victory over the Prussians at Ligny the next day. That said, already the campaign was falling into disarray: not only had large parts of the army been very slow to move, but the chance of either a far bigger victory at Ligny or a defeat of Wellington's forces at Quatre Bras was lost due to poor staff work, which led to the powerful corps of General Jean-Baptiste Drouet spending the day marching from one battlefield to the other and then back



again without firing a single shot. Far from being driven asunder, on 17 June, the two allied armies were able to retire in good order to mutually supportive positions a few kilometers south of Brussels at Wavre in the case of the Prussians and a dominant ridge known as Mont Saint-Jean in the case of the Anglo-Dutch, leaving Napoléon and Marshal Emmanuel de Grouchy (the commander he had sent to pursue the Prussians) groping blindly at their rear in the midst of a torrential thunderstorm that inundated the countryside and slowed progress to a crawl.<sup>1</sup>

What, meanwhile, of the topography that was shortly to be the scene of such carnage? In the same way as many aspects of the battle, this has been much misrepresented.<sup>2</sup> The battlefield of Waterloo is commonly envisaged as a simple matter of two parallel ridges with a shallow valley in between. Rather what one has is a rolling upland pitted with a variety of dips, valleys, and indentations, with all the high ground being of a similar elevation. Having emerged from the forest of Soignies and passed through Waterloo, where Wellington had his headquarters, the Brussels-Charleroi highway rose gradually for the 3.2 kilometers (km) that it took to reach the battlefield. After perhaps three-quarters of the distance, a second highway branched off to the southwest in the direction of Nivelles at the small hamlet of Mont Saint-Jean, at which point the Charleroi highway ascended a steep slope culminating in a long east-west ridge: known, like both the hamlet and the substantial walled farm halfway up the hill, as Mont Saint-Jean, it was this that provided Wellington with his main fighting position, and here, too, that the upland mentioned begins. At the crest, the highway was crossed at 90 degrees by a lane stretching left and right, the junction being marked by a solitary elm tree.

<sup>1</sup> There are many accounts of the Waterloo campaign. For a recent version that is particularly closely argued, see John Hussey, *Waterloo: The Campaign of 1815*, vol. 1, *From Elba to Ligny and Quatre Bras* (London: Greenhill Books, 2017), 340–584; and John Hussey, *Waterloo: The Campaign of 1815*, vol. 2, *From Waterloo to the Restoration of Peace in Europe* (London: Greenhill Books, 2017), 1–53.

<sup>2</sup> For a good example, one might cite David G. Chandler, *Waterloo: The Hundred Days* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 1980), 112. Thus: “Wellington’s position . . . occupied a low ridge set slightly south of the village of Mont Saint Jean. . . . Behind this line . . . were a number of useful rear slopes. To the fore of it, the ground was broken to the east of the Brussels high road by a number of small rises and depressions, but the western sector was a relatively flat and unbroken area.” Setting aside the fact that this passage appears to confuse the two halves of the battlefield with one another, it is so vague as to be useless.

## *The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle*

To the east, this lane, which ran from the town of Braine-l'Alleud 3.2 km to the northwest to the village of Ohain 3.2 km to the west, was lined on both sides by thorn hedges, but to the east the ground was completely open. In the immediate vicinity of the crossroads, both the Charleroi highway and the Ohain road were deeply sunken, the banks rising to as much as three meters on either side, while the forward slope of the ridge to the east of the highway was broken by a prominent knoll, immediately beneath which there was a shallow quarry that has generally been referred to as a sandpit.<sup>3</sup>

Insofar as the ground was concerned, to the east the battlefield was much as it has generally been portrayed: across a shallow valley perhaps a kilometer wide, a second ridge ran from east to west, more or less parallel to Wellington's position. However, several hundred yards to the west, rising a little as it did so, a broad ridge jutted out diagonally in the direction of the French lines, which it reached in the vicinity of the spot where they were crossed by the Charleroi highway; an important local watershed, this cut the battlefield completely in two and rendered it quite impossible for troops posted to the east of the highway to see what was going on to the west and vice versa. To the west of this feature, there was a deep hollow that after perhaps 2 km led to a broad north-south valley through which ran the dead-straight Nivelles highway, said hollow being crossed diagonally at its eastern end by a lane that ran in a roughly southeasterly direction from the Ohain road and joined the Charleroi highway just a little short of the spot where it reached the French ridge, this last being much more prominent to the east of the highway than it was to the west.

Even this passage does not exhaust the complications offered by the battlefield. As the Charleroi highway rose toward the French positions, it passed through a deep cutting occasioned by the presence of a significant swell in the ground (referred to in this work as the *intermediate ridge*) that ran parallel with the French position for much

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<sup>3</sup>To the best of the author's knowledge, the most detailed piece of its sort that has ever been published, the description offered in this work of the battlefield of Waterloo is the fruit of thorough exploration of the whole area in the course of the elaboration of the work, Esdaile, *Walking Waterloo* (Yorkshire, UK: Pen and Sword, 2019). Readers may also be interested in obtaining the free e-guide to the battlefield available at *Waterloo* on the Apple App Store, accessed 14 June 2022.

of its length, and was separated from it on both sides of the watershed mentioned above by a shallow valley. Behind the French right, there was a much deeper depression and then a ridge that connected the upland crossed by the Charleroi highway with a further mass of high ground known as the heights of Agiers, this last feature thrusting a pronounced shoulder southward that all but merged with the ridge that marked the French front line and hid a deep reentrant that angled sharply back uphill from the valley beneath Wellington's extreme left flank and was home to the hamlet of Smohain (today Marache).

From Smohain, a lane ran southward up the side of the reentrant and at the top of the slope this crossed what was to turn out to be the most important channel of communications on the battlefield, namely a country road that led westward from Wavre to Braine-l'Alleud. Having crossed a small river some distance to the west at the village of Lasne, this road ascended the heights of Agiers via a thick wood called the Bois de Paris, and then ran due west along the ridge parallel to the rear of the French front line to a spot above a second and far more substantial village called Plancenoit situated in a deep valley to the left, at which point it turned sharply to the north and ran uphill to the high ground crossed by the Charleroi highway, where it turned sharply to the west once more, and, crossing the highway, dropped down into the dip behind the intermediate ridge where it followed a generally northwesterly course in the direction of the Nivelles road and, beyond it, Braine-l'Alleud. To the left of this last stretch, the ground was undulating, the most important feature being a pronounced eminence just beside the Charleroi highway, but it generally sloped upward to a farther area of high ground that marked the southern edge of the upland on which the battle was fought.<sup>4</sup>

With the exception of the need to note that, except for the Bois de Paris, patches of woodland either side of the Wavre-Braine-l'Alleud road at the western end of the ridge above Plancenoit and various fea-

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<sup>4</sup> By sheer happenstance, at the time of the battle the high ground in question was crowned by an observation tower that had been erected by Dutch cartographers engaged in the elaboration of an up-to-date map of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands. Despite the fact that the structure constituted an obvious observation post, neither Napoléon nor anyone on his staff appear ever to have made use of it. Why this was so is unclear, but one explanation is that it may simply have been deemed too rickety to ascend with any safety or even in such a state of dilapidation that it could not be ascended at all.

## *The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle*

tures at Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte (see below), the battlefield was almost treeless, and, further, that it was mostly given over to the cultivation of cereal crops grown in broad open fields, there is little more that needs to be said about the physical geography.<sup>5</sup> As for the human geography, this was limited. Setting aside the two villages and the farm of Mont Saint-Jean, on the French side of the battlefield the course of the highway was marked successively by two wayside taverns, of which the first was known as La Belle Alliance and the second owned by a man named De Coster, and, a kilometer to the south near the southern edge of the upland, a house called Rossomme. In the rear of the French left beside the Nivelles road was a large country house called Mon Plaisir, and, more or less opposite it at the other extreme of the battlefield on the slopes overlooking Smohain, the château of Frischermont. However, the most important buildings on the battlefield by far were the four complexes that dotted the forward slope of Wellington's position, from east to west, these being the farms of La Haye, Papelotte, and La Haye Sainte and the château of Hougoumont.

Beginning with the first two locations, these stood side by side a few hundred yards from Smohain, though La Haye was a mere cluster of buildings while Papelotte was a stoutly built courtyard farm. Meanwhile, another courtyard farm, screened to its south by a small orchard, La Haye Sainte constituted a compact rectangle built on a north-south axis immediately beside the Charleroi highway perhaps 250 yards south of the crossroads. And, finally, situated deep in the hollow beneath the watershed in advance of Wellington's right flank, Hougoumont was a much larger affair than any of the rest, comprising the château (a three-story building surrounded by a series of barns, stables, and store sheds); a large formal garden protected on its southern and eastern sides by a high wall; a kitchen garden; an orchard; a paddock; and a large wood that stretched southward all the way to the summit of the intermediate ridge. Much of the perimeter

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<sup>5</sup> The cereals concerned were mostly a variety of rye that could grow to a height of two meters or more. Given that the battle was fought at a time of year when, if still green, the shoots were fully grown, this meant that initially the visibility of the troops was often very limited. As time went on, of course, the fields became more trampled, but, if the combatants could see one another, they now had to contend with ground that was not just deep in mud but also covered by a mat of tangled stalks that tripped them up and ripped the boots from their feet.

was surrounded by a dense hedge and ditch, while a farther hedge separated the orchard from the paddock.

Hougoumont was linked to the Ohain road by a lane lined by a row of poplars, while other lanes besides the ones already mentioned crisscrossed the battlefield in various directions—from Hougoumont to La Belle Alliance; from Papelotte to La Belle Alliance; from Smohain to Plancenoit; from Plancenoit to the Charleroi highway; and from Rossomme to the Nivelles road—but, though occasionally deeply sunken, particularly in the vicinity of Papelotte, they were to play little role in the battle. With the exception of the Charleroi highway and the Nivelles road, all the roads were mere country lanes with no paving of any sort, the heavy rain therefore meaning that they were all deep in mud even before the fighting began. Indeed, with the whole of the battlefield composed of a thick clay soil, the going was at best heavy and, in places, completely impossible.

With the scene duly set, let us proceed to a narrative of the battle. Although the rain stopped at first light, dawn on 18 June 1815 was a damp and miserable affair, while many of the French troops had yet even to reach the field. For some little time, there was no chance of anything happening, and it was not in fact till about 1130 that the battle began. In consequence, the Army of the Netherlands (the name given to Wellington's forces) was able to deploy without the slightest haste, its order of battle showing the British general's mind all too clearly. Thus, believing that the Prussians would arrive very quickly, Wellington left his left flank but thinly held: from the crossroads to Smohain, there were the equivalent of a mere six brigades of infantry, of which only two were British, and three brigades of cavalry; still worse, several of the units concerned, especially the British brigade of Sir Denis Pack and the Dutch one of Willem van Bijlandt, had suffered very heavy casualties at Quatre Bras, while two others were composed entirely of low-grade Hanoverian militia. By contrast, from the crossroads to the Nivelles road, there were six infantry brigades, of which four were either British or King's German Legion, and seven cavalry brigades, and from the Nivelles road to Braine-l'Alleud seven infantry brigades, of which three were either British or King's German Legion, most of the troops in this last section of

the line being held well back so as in effect to create a refused flank.<sup>6</sup> Obviously enough, it was felt that the real danger rather lay in the relatively open ground in front of Braine-l'Alleud, Wellington being so concerned about his right that he posted a further 10,500 men well to the west at Halle in case the emperor should try a wide outflanking movement. Quite why he should have thought this was a possibility, however, it is hard to see, for, even if successful, an attack on his right flank would only have driven him toward the Prussians, this being precisely the object that Napoléon was least likely to desire.<sup>7</sup>

In assessing Waterloo, Wellington's many admirers have made much of the strength of the position he adopted. This last was certainly far from bad, but nor was it impregnable. If the ridge certainly offered protection from artillery fire, not to mention complete concealment for almost all his army, in very few places were its slopes a serious obstacle to movement, while Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, and Papelotte-La Haye were of less use than is sometimes suggested. Best of all was probably the often neglected Papelotte-La Haye as this offered its defenders an excellent field of fire in all directions, but the value of the other two was more dubious. Situated in a deep hollow and almost entirely masked by trees, Hougoumont was near useless unless troops could hold the outer perimeter of the wood and the orchards, this being something the limited garrison it was given found impossible to achieve, while the layout of La Haye Sainte was very inconvenient in that troops trying to defend the orchard at its southern end could neither retire nor be reinforced with any ease for want of any gate or door in the southern wall. Still worse, there were few apertures

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<sup>6</sup> Readers may not be familiar with the King's German Legion. In brief, this was a force of foreign auxiliaries that had been incorporated into the British Army that was renowned for its high levels of discipline and skill at arms. Originally enlisted from units of the Hanoverian Army that had escaped Napoléon when the latter took over their home country in 1803, it had since been augmented by large numbers of refugees from many parts of northern Germany and thousands of Germans, Swiss, and even Poles who had either deserted Napoléon's service or elected to join the legion rather than languish as prisoners of war.

<sup>7</sup> One idea that has been much stressed is that Wellington feared for his links with Ostend, a port that had indeed witnessed the disembarkation of many of his troops and their attendant equipment and stores. However, it having been shown that Wellington planned to retreat on Antwerp rather than Ostend, this line of argument can be discounted. See Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: Myth and Reality* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2014), 105.

in the walls on either side; the outer door of the main barn had been taken for firewood; and, unlike at Hougomont (see below), nothing had been done to prepare the buildings for defense. On the bright side, neither position was especially helpful to troops attacking the ridge as they offered no view of the defenders' positions and could easily be pounded by artillery should they be taken; the keys to victory for Wellington they most certainly were not, with the real importance of both La Haye Sainte and Hougomont being simply that they denied the French the space they needed for the combined operations that were their best chance of breaking Wellington's line and then only in a sector that was far from uppermost in Napoléon's thoughts.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to Wellington's expectation, in fact, the emperor was not initially planning to attack his right wing at all: believing that the Prussians were out of the fight though he might, he did not wish to do anything that would increase the chances of the British commander linking up with Blücher. As his troops came up, they were arrayed in a convex line stretching from beyond the Nivelles road to the slopes opposite Papelotte and in this matter placed so as to threaten the whole length of their opponents' position. In brief, the three divisions of Honoré Charles Reille's II Corps held the sector from the Nivelles road to La Belle Alliance and the four of Drouet's I Corps from La Belle Alliance to Papelotte with their respective light cavalry divisions on their outer flanks. In reserve, three on each side of the road, were six divisions of cavalry (the two divisions apiece of III and IV Cavalry Corps and the two divisions of cavalry of the guard) and, arrayed in the vicinity of Rossomme, the three divisions of guard infantry.<sup>9</sup> Due to form, a further reserve in rear of the right wing were Georges Mouton's severely understrength VI Corps, one division of which had ended up with Grouchy, and two stray cavalry divisions that had become detached from the latter's forces, though none of these troops were as yet anywhere near the battlefield; badly delayed by the rain, they were not

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<sup>8</sup> To write thus in defiance of the insistence of so many authorities that either Hougomont or La Haye Sainte were the key to the Battle of Waterloo may seem foolhardy, but a close study of the ground makes it all but impossible to take such claims at face value.

<sup>9</sup> It is customary to refer to Ney rather than the Duke d'Elchingen and to Nicolas-Jean de Dieu Soult as the Duke of Dalmatie. That being the case, logic dictates that Drouet and his counterpart at the head of VI Corps, Mouton, should be referred to by their surnames rather than their titles (i.e., D'Erlon and Lobau).

to appear until the early afternoon.<sup>10</sup> In charge of the troops in the first line—those of Drouet and Reille—was Ney, who appears to have occupied the role of a senior executive officer, but all the rest of the army was kept firmly under the control of the emperor.<sup>11</sup>

At first sight, the sheer symmetry of the French Army of the North's initial disposition might suggest that what was intended was a head-on attack, and the emperor did in fact later claim that this was his aim. If such was the intended impression, in reality it was a trick designed to obscure Napoléon's real intentions. Thus, abjuring the cluttered terrain to the west in favor of the open hillsides to the east, the emperor planned to launch a massive attack on Wellington's left with I Corps—it was no mistake that this was both the largest and the freshest of his formations—while keeping back the guard, VI Corps, and most of his cavalry for the final coup de grâce.<sup>12</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, of course, it can be argued that an attack on

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<sup>10</sup> The disposition of the French Army is another matter that is poorly handled by the traditional historiography. Herewith, for example, David Chandler on the position of Mouton's troops and the infantry of the guard: "In central reserve on each side of the Brussels road, Napoleon deployed his reserves. To the east of Maison du Roi [a small hamlet on the main highway] were placed the long cavalry columns of Domon's and Subervie's divisions. . . . On the opposite side of the road were the infantry columns of Simmer's and Jeannin's divisions. Last but by no means least stood the serried ranks of the Imperial Guard, flanked by the guns of the artillery reserve on either side of the farm of Rossomme." Chandler, *Waterloo*, 121–22. Setting aside the fact that Chandler is again muddled in his grasp of the detail—Maison du Roi is actually south of Rossomme rather than north—like many other historians he was misled by Napoléon's attempts to rewrite history so as to hide his many errors. For the actual situation, see Bernard Coppens, *Les mensonges de Waterloo: les manipulations de l'histoire enfin révélées* (Brussels: Jourdan Editions, 2009), 249–54.

<sup>11</sup> Much influenced by Napoléon's attempts to blame everybody but himself for the defeat at Waterloo, many historians have laid the responsibility for everything that went wrong on 18 June at Ney's door. However, there is no evidence that the marshal ever did anything other than relay the orders that were conveyed to him by his imperial master. It is possible that the climactic attack of the guard may in part have been miscarried by a failure on his part to keep the 10 battalions concerned together, but this is clearly the utmost limit of his fault.

<sup>12</sup> Basing his work on the emperor's later claims, Chandler is happy with the traditional version, writing baldly, "No time was to be wasted on manoeuvre: success was to be won by a series of massive frontal assaults." Chandler, *Waterloo*, 126. However, as a number of later historians have pointed out, the original documents, and, in particular an order dictated around 1100, prove beyond all doubt that it was the out-flanking maneuver that was the chosen battle plan. For example, see Tim Clayton, *Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe's Destiny* (London: Little, Brown, 2014), 365.



Wellington's left was foolhardy indeed, as it effectively meant that a good half of the French Army would in effect be marching into a trap, but it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that, on the morning of 18 June, the emperor did not have the slightest reason to believe that Blücher was coming: that there was a force of Prussians at Wavre, he knew full well, Grouchy having told him as much the previous evening, but, in a further note penned at 0600 in the morning, the latter insisted that, if the whole Prussian Army was at Wavre rather than the mere 10,000 he had at first placed there, there was no need to worry as they were withdrawing on Brussels.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the random shots that rang out when some French cavalry chased off a few German infantry who had been sent to garrison Smohain and Frischermont, it was not on the eastern half of the battlefield that the battle began, however. On the contrary, realizing that his great right hook needed to be secured against a spoiling attack, having had three batteries of 12-pounder guns subject Wellington's center to a preliminary barrage, Napoléon sent orders for Reille to dispatch some troops to occupy the extensive wood in his front.<sup>14</sup> This was, of course, the same wood that masked Hougomont, but the fact that it concealed a strong and well-garrisoned fortified post—unlike at La Haye Sainte, the 1,300-strong garrison, almost all at this point either Hanoverians or Nassauers, had had time to build firing steps, barricade some of the gates, and knock extra loopholes in the walls—was entirely lost on Napoléon, for the buildings were entire-

<sup>13</sup> Few aspects of Waterloo have given rise to more controversy than the actions of Grouchy. For a full-length discussion of his part in events, see Paul L. Dawson, *Napoleon and Grouchy: The Last Great Waterloo Mystery Unravelled* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2020). Why Grouchy thought Blücher was withdrawing is unclear, but it may be that he was confused by the fact that the first troops to leave their encampments and march to join Wellington—Gen Friedrich Wilhelm von Bülow's IV Corps—had spent the night in the fields south of the river (the Dyle) on whose northern bank Wavre was built and therefore had to file through the town to reach the safest route to the battlefield.

<sup>14</sup> It is generally agreed that the battle-proper began at around 1130 in the morning. To explain the delay in going into action, apologists for Napoléon have always claimed that he wanted the ground to dry out after the downpours of the previous 18 hours. See, for example, Chandler, *Waterloo*, 126. However, as anyone who has walked the battlefield in the wake of heavy rain can attest, to imagine that a mere two hours could have made the slightest difference is whimsical in the extreme. What occasioned the delay, then, was rather simply that large parts of Napoléon's army were still on their way to the battlefield.

ly invisible to him and not marked on the map he was using with any great clarity. This should have made no difference for, to carry out their orders, Reille's men needed only to seize the wood and the orchard, but in command of the attackers was Napoléon's younger brother, Jérôme. A headstrong and foolish individual who was ever out for glory, having almost literally bumped into the château, he resolved on its capture at all costs, and the result was a prolonged struggle that negated the position's value as a firebase and pulled in the bulk of a particularly valuable British guards brigade, but at the same time came permanently to absorb fully one-half of Reille's corps.<sup>15</sup>

The struggle for Hougoumont was marked by many famous incidents of which the most well-known is the episode in which a large party of French troops burst in through the north gate, only to be cut down almost to the last man when the gate was forced shut behind them. In the end, however, horrific though it was—toward the end, many of the buildings caught fire with the loss of many wounded who had been sheltering inside—the fight was but a side issue. Far more crucial were events farther east. Here Napoléon's aim, as we have seen, was to crush Wellington's left. Available for the assault were the four infantry divisions of Drouet's I Corps, namely those of generals Joachim-Jérôme Quiot, François-Xavier Donzelot, Pierre-Louis Binet de Marcognet (commonly known simply as Marcognet), and Pierre-François-Joseph Durutte, but, before they were sent forward, a sustained attempt was made to soften up the defenders with the three heavy artillery batteries attached to I, II, and VI Corps. Composed of 18 12-pounder guns and 8 heavy howitzers, these pounded the area around the crossroads from La Belle Alliance for more than an hour, but, unbeknownst to the French, they inflicted little damage: not only did many of the projectiles simply bury themselves in the waterlogged ground, but the infantry had been ordered to lie down and the cavalry to dismount. Casualties, then were limited, but this did not mean that the assault was not a major threat. On their left flank, the assault forces—some 20,000 men—were supported by a brigade of cuirassiers, while the two divisions in the center of the array—those of Donzelot and Marcognet—were drawn up in an un-

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<sup>15</sup> For the defense of Hougoumont, see Julian Paget and Derek Saunders, *Hougoumont: The Key to Victory at Waterloo* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 1999).

usual formation that saw the eight battalions of which they were each composed drawn up in line one behind the other, the idea being that they could match the firepower of any troops who confronted them while yet maintaining the maneuverability of a column (on either side, by contrast, the divisions of Quiot and Durutte appear to have been deployed in standard brigade or battalion columns of a much more flexible nature).<sup>16</sup>

Drouet's assault, then, was by no means just a matter of brute force. Nor did the careful thought that went into it go unrewarded. First to feel the weight of the assault were the defenders of La Haye Sainte, the rifle-armed 2d Light Battalion of the King's German Legion commanded by Major Georg Baring.<sup>17</sup> Overwhelmed by the enemy skirmishers, the soldiers whom Baring had placed to hold the orchard were forced to flee into the open fields to the west, where they were succored by a Hanoverian infantry battalion that had been sent down from the ridge above to cover their retreat. This last decision, however, proved a grievous error: to their horror, the riflemen and Hanoverians suddenly found themselves assailed by the cuirassier brigade mentioned above. Being closer to the farm, most of Baring's men managed to make it back inside, but the Hanoverians were completely routed and effectively ceased to exist as a fighting unit. Still worse, a King's German Legion battalion sent forward to cover their retreat (the 8th Line) was also caught by the French cavalry and driven back with the loss of a color. On the other side of the farm, things were just as bad: if the troops of Quiot's division were unable to break into the buildings, they did overrun the knoll and quarry a little farther up the highroad, the defenders of which—several companies of the first battalion of the elite 95th Regiment of Foot or, as they are commonly but erroneously referred to, the 95th Rifles (unlike the vast majority of British infantry, the 95th Rifles were armed with rifles rather than muskets and arrayed in dark green rather than red)—fled in disorder, while the sudden appearance of cuirassiers on the slopes above La Haye Sainte caused a panic that saw

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<sup>16</sup> Paul L. Dawson, *Waterloo: The Truth at Last—Why Napoleon Lost the Great Battle* (Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2018), 63–64.

<sup>17</sup> As the term *legion* would have suggested to contemporaries, the King's German Legion consisted of a variety of different forms of troops: musket-armed line infantry dressed in red, rifle-armed light infantry dressed in green, light cavalry, and artillery.

the whole battalion fall back to the rear. Only once they had breast-ed the knoll and reached the sunken Ohain road did Quiot's men experience any check. Setting aside the so-called 95th Rifles, the front line of the defenders was composed of the Dutch brigade of Bijlandt. Having suffered very heavy casualties at Quatre Bras, the troops concerned were in no condition to resist an assault by four French divisions and, after a brief fight, they too turned and fled. Behind them, however, were the two veteran British infantry brigades of Sir James Kempt and Sir Denis Pack, and, notwithstanding the terrible losses they too had endured at Quatre Bras, these immediately launched a counterattack. On the right, under the personal direction of their divisional commander, Sir Thomas Picton, Kempt's three remaining battalions (the 95th appears not yet to have rallied from its earlier disorder) scored an immediate success in that, suddenly leaping up from behind the crest of the ridge, they checked Quiot's division with a single volley followed by a bayonet charge. Regardless of the effect, Picton was shot dead, while, to the left, Pack's brigade had been less fortunate. Thus, advancing to attack Marcognet's division, it was thrown back by a massive volley and completely checked.<sup>18</sup>

For a moment, it looked as if the French had broken through, but there now followed one of the most dramatic episodes in the battle. Behind Picton's troops was the heavy cavalry brigade of Major General Sir William Ponsonby, while across the Charleroi highway in a similar position was that of General Lord Robert Edward Somerset (by chance comprising one English, one Irish, and one Scottish regiment, the former was quickly nicknamed the "Union Brigade," just as the fact that the latter was largely drawn from the Life Guards and Royal Horse Guards gained it the sobriquet of the "Household Brigade"). Apparently, at the personal initiative of the commander of the British cavalry, Lord Uxbridge, these two brigades launched a dramatic charge that took them through the crumbling allied front line and into the oncoming enemy. Initially, success was complete: taken by surprise, the French recoiled in disorder and in many instances turned to flee altogether, the spoils of the victorious cavalry including two eagles and perhaps 3,000 prisoners. However, drunk on glory, the two British brigades now got out of control, galloping

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<sup>18</sup> Glover, *Waterloo*, 122–29; and Coppens, *Mensonges de Waterloo*, 199–209.

down into the low ground below Wellington's position, and in some instances even getting up onto the intermediate ridge where they rode down a number of I Corps' divisional batteries, these last having advanced to occupy the obvious position it offered.<sup>19</sup> The result was disaster. French cavalry under Generals Charles Claude Jacquinet and Jacques-Antoine-Adrien Delort moved against the milling horsemen from east and west alike and slaughtered them in great numbers, less than half their number eventually making it back to their original positions, and many of them only doing so at all thanks to a timely charge on the part of the British light-cavalry brigade of Sir John Vandeleur near Papelotte.<sup>20</sup>

The survivors of the brigades of Ponsonby (also among the dead) and Somerset were for the time being out of the battle, but through their actions they had thwarted what was probably Napoléon's best chance of victory. Nevertheless, the emperor was far from finished. On the right, Durutte's division had not been much affected by Uxbridge's counterattack and had therefore continued to press forward, thereby inaugurating what became a long and bitter battle for La Haye and Papelotte. Entirely composed of Dutch and Germans who had lost many men at Quatre Bras, the defenders were pressed ever backward and were eventually driven from La Haye altogether, the French ruler therefore resolving to exploit their success by sending in Mouton's VI Corps, which was only just now debouching onto the battlefield to the rear of Plancenoit, the idea being that this would push down through the valley in which Smohain was situated and swing round the allied left flank. Also, given the support of the two cavalry divisions detached from Grouchy's command, such a move seemed to promise every success, but, until it could be brought to fruition, there was a major problem in that much of Napoléon's front line was in complete disarray: on the left, Reille continued to be bogged down at Hougomont, while on the right the three divisions

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<sup>19</sup> It has been repeatedly claimed that the artillery concerned started the battle emplaced on the ridge attacked by the British cavalry, but this is manifestly untrue: to have deployed the batteries in so exposed a position in the presence of an enemy whose every disposition was almost completely unknown would have been to risk disaster, while the presence of the guns and all their attendant crews, limbers, and caissons would have rendered the advance of Drouet's infantry all but impossible.

<sup>20</sup> Glover, *Waterloo*, 133–43.

caught by the British cavalry were still badly shaken. It is in this context that what happened next has to be understood. In brief, virtually all the available cavalry were flung into an assault on Wellington's right-center. According to the traditional version, this was the result of Ney being mistakenly convinced that the Anglo-Dutch forces were retreating, but all the evidence suggests that the author of what happened was rather Napoléon. Given the emperor's determination to shift all the blame for his misfortunes elsewhere, we can only speculate as to why he acted as he did, but the most probable explanation is that he was concerned that, with much of his army shaken and off-balance, there was a serious danger his opponent might launch a general assault. As massed cavalry charges had proved a very effective way of staving off disaster in several of his earlier battles, most notably Eylau and Aspern-Essling, the remedy was obvious, and thus it was that, while as many French guns as possible continued to pound the allied line, at about 1600 that afternoon the first of the 9,000 troops concerned moved forward along the axis of the watershed ridge, some of them also spilling over into the hollow that separated it from Hougoumont.<sup>21</sup>

There followed extraordinary scenes. Advancing on Wellington's line at a pace no better than a lumbering trot (the ground was far too waterlogged for anything else), the cuirassiers of Generals Édouard

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<sup>21</sup> The explanation for the great French cavalry attack is far from clear and will always be a matter for dispute. According to the traditional version, the entire responsibility belonged to Ney, convinced by movement on the ridge (probably the withdrawal of a number of artillery batteries that had run out of ammunition) that Wellington was retreating. However, this was the view put about by Napoléon and therefore cannot but be regarded as being open to question. Just as doubtful, meanwhile, is the alternative claim that Ney ordered only a single corps—that of Gen Milhaud—to ascend the ridge, the rest of the French cavalry then becoming carried away by excitement and following of their own volition. That being the case, the consensus is now that, while Ney does indeed seem to have ordered a brigade of cavalry to ascend the ridge, this was rather to support a fresh attack on La Haye Sainte, the general advance rather being the work of the emperor alone, a view for which support can be found in the memoirs of imperial aide-de-camp Auguste Charles Joseph de Flahaut. See Clayton, *Waterloo*, 456–58; Hussey, *Waterloo*, vol. 2, 142–44; and Alessandro Barbero, *The Battle: A New History of Waterloo*, trans. John Cullen (New York: Walker, 2005), 244–45. However, it is but fair to note that other authors, including the normally skeptical Coppens, remain convinced that while the emperor may have ordered various units to support the initial advance, the initiative came from Ney. See Dawson, *Waterloo*, 182–86; Coppens, *Les Mensonges de Waterloo*, 225–36; and Glover, *Waterloo*, 145.

Milhaud and François Kellermann, not to mention the two divisions of cavalry belonging to the Imperial Guard, crowded into the narrow front offered by the gap between La Haye Sainte and Hougomont under a hail of artillery fire. Reaching the crest, they overran most of the batteries that lined it but then hit an insuperable obstacle. Thus, all the way from Hougomont to the Charleroi highway, the French move had led to the allied infantry being deployed in two lines of squares. So long as the defenders held their nerve, such formations were impervious to cavalry, and the result was that the horsemen milled about them in confusion while at the same time suffering heavy losses to musketry. Nor was this an end to their travails, for the squares were backed by numerous regiments of British and Dutch cavalry, and these countercharged the discomfited French horse and drove them back over the crest, only immediately to gallop back to their original positions to reform. For the next two hours, the same process was repeated with the increasingly desperate French cavalry losing heavy casualties each time they returned to the charge and achieving almost nothing in return for their efforts. That said, the defenders did not go unpunished: forced to remain in square and in some cases deprived of the shelter of the ridge (the worst sufferers were Sir Frederick Adam's brigade, this last having been deployed in the open fields to the east of Hougomont in an effort to safeguard communications with the château), in between the French charges they suffered very badly from artillery fire. Had a mass of infantry been available to follow up the cavalry attacks, something more might have been obtained, but, when the division and a half of Reille's corps that were the only troops available in the sector for such a task were finally ordered forward, they were flung back with enormous losses (a particularly interesting point to note here is that, despite the presence nearby of thousands of French horsemen, the troops concerned received no support from them whatsoever, this being yet further evidence of the failure of Napoléon to coordinate the activities of his forces).<sup>22</sup>

At this point in the battle, Napoléon still possessed substantial reserves in the form of the three divisions of infantry belonging to

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<sup>22</sup> Glover, *Waterloo*, 146–51; Hussey, *Waterloo*, 142–48; and Dawson, *Waterloo*, 185–250, 281–308.

the Imperial Guard. That they were not forthcoming brings us to a dramatic development in the narrative. As we have seen, during the night Wellington had received assurances from Blücher that he would march to his assistance with his entire army at first light. Completely unmolested by Grouchy, who was still many kilometers to the south, the Prussian commander proceeded to do just this, but a variety of issues, including, not least, the terrible state of the only roads available, slowed his rate of march dramatically, and it was therefore well past 1600 before the first Prussian troops reached even the Bois de Paris. However, contrary to all the usual accounts of the battle—completely erroneously, it is almost universally claimed that Napoléon spotted Prussian troops in the far distance as early as 1300 and, further, that a captured Prussian hussar was soon after brought to his command post for interrogation—the French were completely unaware of their presence, the fact that Mouton's corps was on hand to deal with the new arrivals being pure happenstance.<sup>23</sup>

In consequence, when Prussian forces—the advanced guard of Friedrich von Bülow's IV Corps—suddenly emerged from the Bois de Paris at about 1630 in the afternoon, it came as a complete shock, so much so, indeed, that Napoléon initially put the firing that suddenly erupted on his extreme right down to an accidental clash between Grouchy's men and those of Mouton. Given the circumstances, the latter did extremely well in that they managed to form a solid defensive line between the woods flanking the road from Lasne to Braine-l'Alleud, while the various units of light cavalry that had been attached to them launched a series of charges designed to slow down the progress of the enemy. However, tough and determined though Mouton was, he could not hope to prevail against the ever-

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<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of the Prussian advance from Wavre and, more particularly, the reasons for the delay in their arrival, see Hussey, *Waterloo*, vol. 2, 150–59. Meanwhile, a number of French accounts showing that, far from having been sent from an entirely fictitious position in rear of the French center to contain the Prussians, Mouton's men were rather taken by surprise while waiting to be dispatched in support of a second attack on Wellington's left are detailed in Dawson, *Waterloo*, 250–55. Finally, for two demolitions of the claim that Napoléon had forewarning of the Prussian advance, see Glover, *Waterloo*, 172; and Coppens, *Les Mensonges de Waterloo*, 187–97. In brief, the claims clearly rest on nothing more than invention, one issue that is particularly problematic being the fact that, at 1300, no Prussians had reached a spot even remotely visible from Napoléon's then-command post at Rossomme.



greater numbers by which he was faced, and, with substantial Prussian forces beginning to push through the low ground to his right, he was forced to conduct a fighting retreat that eventually took him to a position running north from Plancenoit. Securing this last place with one of his four infantry brigades, he then turned at bay, but the Prussians soon drove his men from the outskirts of the village, thereby creating a real crisis: were Plancenoit to fall, the whole French position would become untenable. It was this fresh danger that prevented Napoléon from making any use of the sacrifice of so many of his cavalry, for, rather than sending it to attack Wellington, he was forced to use the whole of the Young Guard to drive back the Prussians. This they did with aplomb, but, having once advanced into Plancenoit, they could not be withdrawn, Bülow's men showing not the slightest sign of slackening the pressure.<sup>24</sup>

If help was at last at hand, the Army of the Netherlands was barely aware that this was the case. Situated in a deep hollow as it was, Plancenoit was all but invisible from Mont Saint-Jean, while, such were the ever-denser clouds of gun smoke that hung over all the combatants, the Prussian advance along the ridge above was screened from view. Indeed, the situation of Wellington's forces now deteriorated dramatically. Having personally taken part in the cavalry charges, following receipt of fresh instructions from Napoléon, Ney now organized a fresh assault on La Haye Sainte. Unfortunately, successively reinforced though it may have been, the garrison was running short of ammunition, and in consequence it was soon overwhelmed. Much encouraged, the troops who had driven them out pressed forward to the crest of the ridge and assailed the defenders with heavy fire, while they also for a second time gained the knoll held by the 1st Battalion, 95th Rifles, and in addition brought up a number of guns, including some that they stationed on the highest point of the watershed in a position in which they could wreak terrible damage on the defenders. Frantic to redeem the situation, the inexperienced William, Prince of Orange ordered Christian von Ompteda's King's German Legion infantry brigade to retake La Haye Sainte, but only one battalion—the 5th Line—was still in a state to fight, and this was

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<sup>24</sup> The best account in English of Bülow's advance and the subsequent battle for Plancenoit is Glover, *Waterloo*, 168–73.

immediately cut down by a force of cuirassiers that had gone unperceived in the thick smoke that now cloaked the whole battlefield and Ompteda killed by French infantry in the farm's kitchen garden. In short, Wellington's army was in serious difficulties, but the decisive blow that might have settled the issue never came, for, when an exultant Ney sent to Napoléon for fresh troops, the emperor refused point-blank to send him any, despite the fact that he still had two divisions of guard infantry within a few yards of his position at La Belle Alliance (for much of the day, he had remained far in the rear at his command post overlooking the farmhouse of Rossomme, but at some point in the afternoon he had come forward to observe the progress of the battle at first hand).<sup>25</sup>

The decision not to send in the guard at this point was fatal, for a concentrated blow might well have broken through and forced Wellington to withdraw. Yet, once again, Napoléon appears to have lost his nerve, backing away from the final gamble that was his only hope of obtaining even a marginal victory (that it would be no more than this was guaranteed by the fact that his cavalry were no longer in any state to pursue Wellington). Instead, he became bogged down in organizing a counterattack by a mere two battalions at Plancenoit, and it was not until another hour had passed that he finally relented and released a part of the guard to follow up Ney's success. By now, however, it was almost certainly too late, for Wellington had rushed in his last reserve—the Dutch division commanded by David Hendrik Chassé previously stationed at Braine-l'Alleud—to shore up his center. Still worse, only 10 battalions of the 15 that might have been employed in the attack actually took part in it, while even they lost their cohesion as they advanced across the muddy and much-encumbered ground and therefore struck Wellington's line at three different paces and anything but in unison. Supported by the troops who had seized La Haye Sainte and led by Ney, the righthand-most elements of the attack succeeded in driving back or putting to flight altogether a number of units that had been hard hit in the course of the day, but even

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<sup>25</sup> For the defense of La Haye Sainte, see Brendan Simms, *The Longest Afternoon: The 400 Men Who Decided the Battle of Waterloo* (London: Penguin, 2014). Meanwhile, that Napoléon rejected Ney's appeals for reinforcements is accepted even by historians predisposed to give Napoléon the benefit of every possible doubt. See, for example, Chandler, *Waterloo*, 155–56.

they were thrown back by Chassé's fresh troops, while the rest of the assault force did not even achieve that much in the way of success, but was routed by a classic British combination of volleys and bayonet charges, the coup de grâce being delivered by the first battalion of the 52d Foot, which wheeled forward from its position on the ridge and took the last French troops still in the fight in the flank. Seeing his advantage, Wellington immediately ordered the right wing of his army to advance, and large numbers of troops therefore swept forward toward La Belle Alliance. Their spirit utterly shattered at the sight of the guard fleeing in panic, all the French troops in the area broke and ran, the only resistance of any sort, and that most short-lived, being put up by three battalions of the guard that had unaccountably been left in the rear.<sup>26</sup>

According to British accounts, it was the guard's defeat that broke Napoléon's army. This, however, is only partially true. Due to the configuration of the ground, few of the French troops who were fighting to the east of the Charleroi highway had any view of the western half of the battlefield, and, if they turned and fled at virtually the same moment in time, it was for an entirely different reason. Thus, for hours many more Prussian troops had been pouring onto the battlefield, but the majority of these had been fed into the fight for Plancenoit. At length, however, a further force that had marched from Wavre by a different route, namely the corps commanded by Hans von Zieten, reached Smohain, where it was temporarily delayed by a fire-fight with some German troops who, having managed to creep back into the village, had mistaken the blue-coated Prussians for fresh enemies. The noise of this fighting greatly cheered the French troops in the vicinity; not surprisingly, they assumed that Grouchy, who in fact had ignored the sound of the guns at Waterloo and continued to follow the orders that he had received to march on Wavre, where he became engaged in a bitter battle with a Prussian rearguard, had arrived (indeed, desperate to spur his troops on to one last effort, Napoléon had spread the idea that Grouchy had come across the entire

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<sup>26</sup> The defeat of the infantry of the Imperial Guard has given rise to an extensive historiography. See, for example, Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: The Defeat of Napoleon's Imperial Guard—Henry Clinton, the 2nd Division and the End of a 200-Year-Old Controversy* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2015); and Nigel Sale, *The Lie at the Heart of Waterloo: The Battle's Hidden Last Half-Hour* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2014).

battlefield). All too soon, however, their delight soon turned to dismay: at almost exactly the same time that the guard was being routed at the other end of the line, Ziethen's men launched a massive attack that immediately broke Durutte's division and soon saw thousands of infantry and cavalry heading for La Belle Alliance.<sup>27</sup>

Given that Plancenoit finally fell at around the same time, all was now lost for Napoléon, who, after a short delay, left the battlefield in his personal carriage. The few units of the guard that were still intact or had at least managed to maintain their integrity tried to cover the retreat, but the army as a whole streamed southward in a state of complete panic. Meanwhile, despite the myth-making with which the battle has been surrounded, there was no heroic last stand. To purloin a famous phrase supposedly uttered by a senior officer of the guard as the rest of the army collapsed, the guard neither died nor surrendered, but rather was swept away in the flood.<sup>28</sup> So ended the Battle of Waterloo. At a minimum of 18,000 for the allies and 24,000 for the French, casualties had been enormous. Yet, had it all been anything other than a glorious irrelevance? Probably not: even had Napoléon triumphed in the Waterloo campaign, there would have been no change in the political situation, and it may therefore safely be assumed that the war would have gone on, and that the allied superiority in numbers would have prevailed in the end. That said, Waterloo did ensure that the war came to an end with a minimum of bloodshed: there was some minor fighting as the allies closed in on Paris, but Napoléon had been so comprehensively beaten that he was left no choice but to abdicate, the provisional government that had taken over power in his stead promptly rushing to secure the best terms that it could. With the erstwhile emperor soon on his way to Saint Helena, truly it was the end of an era.

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<sup>27</sup> The idea that Ziethen's corps broke the right wing of the French Army has been fiercely denied by some British historians. See, for example, Hussey, *Waterloo*, vol. 2, 205–6. However, the evidence of the topography is incontrovertible. For a good account of Ziethen's attack, see Barbero, *The Battle*, 332–36.

<sup>28</sup> Dawson, *Waterloo*, 394–401. The comment is, perhaps, a little unfair, but the idea of the grenadiers and chasseurs of the Old Guard standing firm in square while being shot to pieces by their victorious opponents is a myth: the units concerned appear not to have collapsed in rout, but nor did they fight to the end, rather withdrawing from the field step-by-step in good order.

## Chapter 2



*Author's collection*

The western half of the battlefield of Waterloo. The Anglo-Dutch front line followed the lane just visible on the left.



*Author's collection*

The ground occupied by the right wing of Drouet's corps at the start of the battle. When the Prussians joined the action, they did so on the high ground in the background immediately to the right of the prominent copse.

*The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle*



*Author's collection*

The view south along the crest of the watershed that united the British and French positions. Note how the ground falls away to either side.



*Author's collection*

The lane from Lasne to Braine-l'Alleud looking east from the vicinity of Plancenoit. Mouton's first position occupied the skyline between the two woods.

## Chapter 2



*Author's collection*

The farm of Papelotte viewed from the extreme right of the position of Durutte's division. Though less well-known than Hougomont and La Haye Sainte, given Napoléon's battle plan, it was far more important than either.



*Author's collection*

The lane leading diagonally from the Ohain road to La Belle Alliance looking south. The skyline is formed by the crest of the watershed that split the battlefield in two. On the morning of 18 June 1815, the going would have been at least as bad, if not worse.

## *The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle*



*Author's collection*

The center-left of Wellington's position viewed from La Belle Alliance. On the left can be seen the Brussels-Charleroi highway, while the green swell across the center of the photograph marks the line of the intermediate ridge on which Napoléon planted his grand battery. The open terrain in this part of the battlefield (the wood on the skyline is a modern addition) made it far more attractive as a theater of operations than the more difficult ground on the other side of the main road.



*Author's collection*

The south face of Hougoumont. Situated in a deep hollow and screened by a thick wood, the château was all but useless as a defensive position and played no part in Napoléon's plans.



## Chapter 2



*Author's collection*

La Haye Sainte viewed from the watershed. The field in the foreground was the scene of the destruction of the Hanoverian battalion sent down to support the defenders, and, soon thereafter, the charge of the Household Brigade.



*Author's collection*

The site of the counterattack of Kempt's brigade. In the background can be seen the farm of Mont Saint-Jean.

*The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle*



*Author's collection*

The valley between Mont Saint-Jean and the intermediate ridge with La Haye Sainte just visible on the extreme right. As bare today as they were in 1815, these fields witnessed the advance of Drouet's corps and, soon after, the destruction of the Union Brigade.



*Author's collection*

The ground over which the French cavalry advanced to reach Wellington's positions showing La Haye Sainte and, to its left, the cluster of post-1815 buildings that mark the point where the Ohain road crosses the Brussels-Charleroi highway. The watershed provided a relatively easy route for the massed horsemen.

## Chapter 2



*Author's collection*

The view looking east from the knoll near La Belle Alliance traditionally regarded as Napoléon's battlefield command post. From neither here nor his rear headquarters at Rossomme is it possible to see farther than the western extremity of the Bois de Paris: to claim, then, that the emperor spotted the oncoming Prussians as early as 1300 is ridiculous.



*Author's collection*

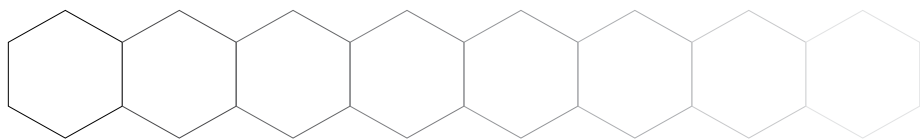
The valley between the French first position and the now-vanished château of Frischermont through which Zeithen's corps burst at the close of the battle.

*The Waterloo Campaign and the Battle*



*Author's collection*

The Ohain road looking west from Wellington's center. The low bank sheltered Maitland's brigade as it awaited the attack of the Imperial Guard, while the fields to the right mark the spot where the Anglo-Dutch squares earlier withstood the French cavalry.



## Chapter 3

# The March of the Miniatures

## *Fighting Waterloo with Model Soldiers*

As has already been intimated, the idea of staging Waterloo with military miniatures is one that is superficially attractive, but at the same time dogged by problems of every sort. That said, the author has been able to identify no fewer than eight occasions when such a project has been realized. Staged by the duo of Donald Featherstone and his close friend, Peter Gilder, the first of these massive extravaganzas took place in Southampton on 20 March 1965, while another—the work this time of an enthusiast named Michael Buxton who had amassed a collection of no fewer than 17,000 figures—was staged at a Royal Air Force base in Cambridgeshire, UK, in May 1972.<sup>1</sup> No details have survived of the latter clash other than that the victor was Napoléon, but a write-up of the former in the *Wargames Newsletter* suggests that the result was a draw with the French right wing driving back the Anglo-Dutch left and the Anglo-Dutch right wing driving back the French left (a curious feature of the action was that the participation of the Prussians was completely omitted, however, so

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<sup>1</sup> The Featherstone refight can be investigated in “The Battle of Waterloo—Saturday, 20th March 1965,” *Wargamer’s Newsletter*, no. 37 (April 1965): 7–13. It was subsequently repeated at the Duke of York’s headquarters in London; see “Waterloo Wargame—Duke of York’s Headquarters, 1965,” *Prometheus in Aspic* (blog), accessed 1 June 2020. For the Cambridgeshire event, meanwhile, see “Napoleon Triumphs at Waterloo,” *Cambridgeshire Evening News*, 13 May 1972. Sponsored by the Royal Air Force as part of an investigation into new training aids, the collection that formed its basis was taken on a tour of the United States in which the Buxton refight was staged no fewer than 15 times. Interestingly, history was reversed in all but one of these clashes, this being something that cannot but give rise to a suspicion of a certain predilection for the French on the part of their progenitor.

## *The March of the Miniatures*

one has to query whether the exercise counts as a refight of Waterloo at all). For a more comprehensive record, we must rather turn to a more modest event that was organized in April 1975 at a community center in Hull under the aegis of the same Peter Gilder who had collaborated with Featherstone 10 years earlier. By now one of the leading figures in the wargames world, Gilder had become the proprietor of a bespoke Wargames Holiday Centre, in which enthusiasts from around the country could sign up for weeks or weekends of miniature mayhem, and in this capacity had constructed an extensive William Siborne-style representation of the terrain at Waterloo.<sup>2</sup> Shaped like a reversed L lying on its side, the result was certainly imposing, with the space that it occupied measuring approximately 21 feet from east to west and, at its widest point, 15 feet from north to south. As for Gilder's version of the battlefield, insofar as Wellington's position was concerned, the central part of the northern side of the table was taken up by the slopes of Mont Saint-Jean with the farm of La Haye Sainte in a shallow reentrant on its southern slope, and the château of Hougomont and the farm of Papelotte on flatter ground to west and east, respectively. Facing this array along the southern side of the table were the forward slopes of Napoléon's position, with the village of Plancenoit farther back to the right on the arm of the L.

So much for the terrain, but what about the armies? With Gilder able to draw on a lifetime of collecting, the latter-day commanders—Gilder as Napoléon and a seasoned wargamer named John Braithwaite as Wellington—were able to field arrays that, if by no means as remarkable as those available to Buxton, were nonetheless quite extensive. Thus, on the French side 40 units of infantry, 48 units of cavalry, and 14 units of artillery faced 45 units of infantry, 65 units of cavalry, and 10 units of artillery on the allied side, the whole making for some 4,000 figures, all of them beautifully painted (note the use of the word *unit* here: in the report of the refight that has been drawn on for the purposes of this chapter and, one suspects, the rules by which it was conducted, the terms used are rather *battal-*

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, the Wargames Holiday Centre is still in operation, and it continues to stage Battle of Waterloo weekends. See "Waterloo Weekend 'The First of the Calendar,'" Wargames Holiday Centre, accessed 3 June 2020; and Mark Freeth, "Waterloo Weekend, January 2011," *Wargames Illustrated Waterloo 2015 Special* (hereafter, *WIWS*), 56–60.

*ion, squadron, and battery*, but in practice it is better to think of each infantry and cavalry unit as being equivalent to a brigade). Waiting off the table, meanwhile, were yet more figures in the shape, on the one hand, of the men left by Wellington to guard his right flank at Halle, and, on the other, of the three corps of Prussians that Blücher could in theory bring to the battlefield from his overnight position at Wavre.

To control these huge forces, it had been decided that the two teams of wargamers that had been assembled to slug it out with one another would have to be organized into military-style chains of command. Thus, on the French side, Gilder's Napoléon had four corps commanders answering to him (Mouton, Reille, Drouet, and Ney), while on the allied side, Braithwaite's Wellington was served by the same number (Hill, Clinton, Orange, and Picton), each of the 10 army and corps commanders being assisted by an aide de camp.<sup>3</sup> So far, so conventional, but to simulate the difficulties of communication and general fog of war that hampered the efforts of the commanders of the Napoleonic epoch, Gilder and Braithwaite were for the most part restricted to headquarters at opposite ends of the hall from which observation of the battlefield was almost impossible, matters being further complicated by the fact that all communication between them and their corps commanders (and vice versa) had to take the form of written messages that were passed from one player to another by means of a team of umpires who might not ensure that they arrived in good time. That said, the two overall commanders were each given

<sup>3</sup>The inclusion of Ney in the French chain of command is something that is very common in recreations of Waterloo. This is just one instance among many of the manner in which the Napoleonic legend has distorted the interpretation of the battle. Thus, repeatedly, it is Ney who takes the blame for the actions that in one way or another could be deemed to have contributed to the French defeat, the most important example of these being the unsupported cavalry attacks that occupied much of the late afternoon. Yet, such allegations are entirely misplaced: command of the left wing of the Army of the North at Quatre Bras though he had, on 18 June the marshal had no men under his command at all, control of the units he had led two days before having since been taken back by his imperial master. At Waterloo, then, Ney had no command role whatsoever and was reduced to charging around the battlefield cheering on one force after another as they attacked and sometimes even leading them in person. In short, not a single French move had the slightest thing to do with Ney and yet, as the day wore on, so Napoléon came to take out his frustrations on his unfortunate subordinate: if the French cavalry had been ruined, then the fault was that of the marshal, when the fact is that all the decisions taken in the course of the battle were taken by the emperor.

the right to make three personal visits to the table in the course of the game, but even these were strictly circumscribed in that they were only allowed to talk to corps commanders whose command stands were actually in contact with the figures representing them on the tabletop.

So much for the preamble, but what of the battle? This proved a lively affair, certainly, but it did not produce a rerun of history, the day ending with a triumphant Napoléon watching the remains of Wellington's army streaming off the battlefield in complete disorder. In part this was the work of sheer misfortune—a complex system of chance cards and dice throws had been drawn up to determine whether or not the Prussians and the troops at Halle reached the battlefield, and this determined that, while the latter force did turn up on Wellington's right flank toward the end of the battle, not a single Prussian showed their face all day, despite the fact that the odds had deliberately been stacked against any such outcome. However, it was not just bad luck that did it for the allies. In line with history, Braithwaite had opted for a largely static defense based on, to paraphrase Wellington, the principle that either night or the Prussians must come. In this, he was probably correct—a largely unauthorized and incompetently conducted attempt on the part of the corps commander controlling his right wing to advance past Hougoumont and defeat the French left was repulsed with heavy losses—but, as on 18 June 1815, the result was to give the initiative to the French, this being something that Gilder put to good use. Realizing, like Napoléon, that the weak spot in the allied array was Wellington's left wing, he held back his own left and center while launching a heavy attack aimed at rolling up the Anglo-Dutch line from east to west, an attack, moreover, that received the unhesitating support of the bulk of his reserves. Judicious use of the defenders' cavalry might have at least slowed the thrust a little, but the commander of the allied corps concerned—that of the Prince of Orange—failed to show even minimal initiative and allowed his men to be herded into an ever-smaller space on the summit of the ridge. Some help was provided by Wellington, who made a personal visit to the front and fed in the bulk of his reserves to try to check the French onslaught, but it was too little, too late, his counterattack eventually being put to flight. With evening drawing on and Wellington's left being steadily driven in on the



center, Napoléon then launched a master stroke, the whole of Reille's corps being sent across the valley to attack the troops holding the sector immediately to the west of La Haye Sainte. Caught in a nutcracker, the remaining allied forces on Mont Saint-Jean disintegrated, the only bright spot being that French losses were such that it was deemed that Wellington would have been able to retire on Brussels under the protection of his still-unbroken right wing relatively unmolested.<sup>4</sup>

The events of that April day in 1975 were doubtless very exciting for the participants, while admirers of Napoléon at least could take great pleasure in the manner in which history had been reversed. What, if anything, could be learned from it? On one level, perhaps, a great deal. First, there is the issue of grand tactics: both on the right wing and the left, allied attacks and counterattacks were largely a matter of cavalry alone and were therefore far less effective than the assaults on Wellington's left and center, both of which were delivered by forces composed of infantry, artillery, and cavalry alike. Second, there is the very simple point that surrendering the initiative to the enemy is always dangerous as it will allow them to mass the bulk of their forces on a given point while containing a much larger number of enemy troops elsewhere with relatively small numbers of their own. Third, there is the vital importance of teamwork and cooperation at the level of command; aided, perhaps, by the fact that they were old friends who had wargamed together for many years, Gilder and his subordinates functioned extremely well in their roles, while the allied team were mostly strangers to one another—a fortuitous but nonetheless rather neat way of recreating the ad hoc nature of Wellington's army—and by all accounts failed to develop an effective human dynamic. Fourth, there is the issue of the commanders: Braithwaite and Gilder were hampered by similar constraints in terms of what they could and could not do, but it was only the latter who emerged as a decisive influence on the battlefield and displayed

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<sup>4</sup> For all this, see Peter Gilder, D. Golden, and D. McFarlane, "The Battle of Waterloo Refought as a Wargame by Members of the Humberside Military Society and Their Guests, Part 1," *Military Modelling* 5, no. 8 (August 1975): 490–94; and Peter Gilder, D. Golden, and D. McFarlane, "The Battle of Waterloo Refought as a Wargame by Members of the Humberside Military Society and Their Guests, Part 2," *Military Modelling* 5, no. 9 (September 1975): 528–30.

a significant measure of coup d'oeil. And, fifth, there is the issue of good fortune: if the Prussian failure to appear doomed Braithwaite to defeat, for Gilder it opened up a chance for decisive victory.

So much for the refight of 1975. Fun though this last was for admirers of Napoléon, their record thereafter was at best mixed. In June 1987, Eastbourne Wargames Club refought the battle at a scale, as far as the number of figures were concerned, of 1:100, only for the French to suffer a narrow defeat when staunch Anglo-Dutch resistance checked a mass attack launched by the entire French Army of the North in a desperate attempt to secure victory before the Prussians hove into view.<sup>5</sup> In November 2007, the emperor's star rose again when a number of Midlands wargame clubs joined together to mount a two-day refight of the battle at Quorn Hall near Leicestershire, a contest which, thanks in part to sensible planning on the part of the player taking the role of Napoléon—as in the real battle, the French sought to smash Wellington's left by a powerful right hook—and in part to a lackluster effort on the part of Blücher's Prussians, ended in the Anglo-Dutch forces being driven from the field.<sup>6</sup> Impressive as this victory was, however, it was not to be repeated. On the contrary, in the three refights of which we have documentary evidence since then, the result was quite the opposite. The first of these took place in Manchester in 2013 under the aegis of the Mailed Fist Wargames Club and involved approximately 7,500 figures, the result being a draw in which Napoléon was fought to a standstill and, therefore, in practice a French defeat.<sup>7</sup> Oddly enough, both of the next two clashes were held in Scotland. Thus, having assembled a terrain that resembled Gilder's in its magnificence, the same year the historical novelist Iain Gale organized what he termed an *interactive arts event* in Edinburgh. In reality yet another tabletop recreation of the battle in which Gale took the part of Wellington, this saw Napoléon—in this case, well-known Scottish wargamer Bill Gilchrist—play the

<sup>5</sup> P. Helm, "The Pounding Match," *Miniature Wargames*, no. 50 (July 1987): 28–35.

<sup>6</sup> P. Brown, "Waterloo Weekend," *WIWS*, 22–29. In view of what is to come later, it is worth noting that the French victory was more than somewhat gerrymandered, as the masterminds behind the battle having, without telling the allied payers, downgraded the morale of many allied units in the hope that they would crumble that much more quickly.

<sup>7</sup> "Waterloo at Britcon," *WIWS*, 32–37.

game very much in the style of his imperial predecessor in that he employed Drouet's corps to attack Wellington's left, while using that of Reille to tie down his opponent's right by assaulting Hougoumont. However, much as in the original battle, thanks in part to a want of adequate artillery support—the result, according to the wargamer playing Drouet, of the fact that, in an interesting echo of what Clausewitz referred to as *friction*, Gale and the other proprietors of the armies fielded on the day had not got sufficient French guns painted up—the initial attempt to break the Anglo-Dutch left wing failed, while a second attack on the part of Mouton's corps was repulsed without ever even making it to the crest of the ridge and a massed cavalry charge on Wellington's center-right thrown back with heavy losses. Against the Prussians, by now arriving on the field on the French right in ever-greater numbers, more success was obtained, but this was only thanks to the commitment of virtually the whole of the Imperial Guard around Plancenoit, and, with dusk falling, it was therefore deemed that the fighting had ended in a marginal allied victory (marginal, of course, only in terms of what happened within the confines of the refight; in reality, only total victory would have meant anything other than utter defeat for Napoléon).<sup>8</sup>

How many wargames figures were used in the Gale/Gilchrist refight is not recorded, but, whatever the answer, it cannot but be dwarfed by the armies that appeared in the last recorded reconstruction of the battle. June 2019 saw Professor Tony Pollard, the head of a University of Glasgow archaeological team that had been working for some time on the battlefield of Waterloo, stage an event that put everything that had ever gone before in the shade. As part of a plan to assist in the rehabilitation of disabled veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq by sparking off an interest in the past and immersing them in therapeutic occupational-health activities such as painting model soldiers and building scenery, Pollard staged a still more gigantic reconstruction involving no fewer than 22,000 25-mm figures. Believed to be the biggest miniature game run in the public domain in history, this was fought over four tables the length of a full-size gymnasium by teams of dozens of players per side and resulted in an al-

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<sup>8</sup> For the Gale refight, see “The Battle of Waterloo, 1815,” Edinburgh Wargames, accessed 3 June 2020.

lied victory, albeit one that was much narrower than was the case in real life, the chief cause of Napoléon's disaster being that a large part of the French Army got sucked into an unwinnable and, in all probability, irrelevant attack on Hougoumont (a curious example of how the existence of hindsight does not get in the way of wargamers making ridiculous mistakes) that left them wide open to what turned out to be the inexorable advance of the Prussians on their flank and rear.<sup>9</sup>

Given enough resources—time, money, personnel, commitment, and facilities—it is therefore clear that Waterloo can be recreated on the tabletop. However, as a tool for the recreation of historic battles, such are the demands it involves that the figure game is equally clearly deeply flawed, and it may therefore be worthwhile to spend a little time examining another recreation of Waterloo that was organized in 1997. Staged as part of a Channel Four television series entitled *Game of War*, this was a very different affair in that the beautifully painted figures of Featherstone, Gilder, and the rest were replaced by red, blue, and black plastic markers representing brigades and divisions, while the battle now took place on a detailed relief map. Conducted very much at the level of the high command—the generals, all of them senior British soldiers (Napoléon was played by the particularly tough and aggressive Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley), simply ordered this or that division or corps into action, it being left to a team of umpires to decide what happened on the ground (a method known as *free kriegsspiel* that emerged in the late nineteenth century as a means of obviating the need for the rather laborious calculations inherited from Reisswitz and his son)—this produced a French victory. Facing an opponent who opted for a largely static defense, Farrar-Hockley first used his superior cavalry to isolate Hougoumont

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<sup>9</sup> For two battle reports, see Little Wars TV, “The Largest Wargame Ever Played?” 25 June 2019, YouTube video, 4:15; and Napoleonic Wargaming, “The Greatest Game—Waterloo Refought,” 19 June 2019, YouTube video, 23:15. Meanwhile, the background to the game is discussed at length in Noel Williams, “Waterloo Replayed: The Biggest 28mm Recreation of the Battle Ever Attempted,” *Tabletop Gaming*, 11 May 2020. Needless to say, the event was the fruit borne of a huge collaborative effort that involved hundreds of individuals to paint up the massive armies that were needed, not to mention construct scale models of Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, Papelotte, La Belle Alliance, and Plancenoit; the generosity of several companies producing 25-mm figures in offering the organizers massive discounts; and, last but not least, the sponsorship and hospitality of the University of Glasgow.

and thereby allow it to be taken by infantry assault and then used the latter as a launch pad for a push on the Mont Saint-Jean crossroads, which eventually converged with another large force coming from his center-right that had succeeded in taking La Haye Sainte. With his own right and center both completely crushed and the Prussians still only on the fringes of the battlefield, Wellington—Major General John Kiszely—was forced to order a retreat, the point therefore once again being made that speedier action on the part of Napoléon, not to mention better direction of his subordinate commanders, might well have netted the latter a victory.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically designed for television as it was, *Game of War* was not a pure example of free kriegsspiel. However, of all the different ways in which Waterloo can be recreated on the tabletop, this is probably the most effective. As the teams of players are always kept apart from one another—indeed, are typically housed in separate rooms—at the start of the exercise their knowledge of the situation on the battlefield and the moves of their respective enemies can be restricted by the umpires to what they can be adjudged to have known at that moment and intelligence then fed to them on a real-time basis according to events going forward. No more, then, will wargame commanders be able to enjoy their traditional bird's eye view of the battlefield or to respond instantly to the moves of their opponents (a particular point to note here is that news of some crucial enemy move will often not arrive until some time has passed since the development concerned was set in train), while it may be, too, they will receive false intelligence or even no intelligence at all. To take an obvious example, then,

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<sup>10</sup> For the original television program, see *Game of War*, featuring Paddy Griffith and Angela Rippon, aired 3 August 1997, on Channel 4 television. See also R. Cross, ed., *Game of War* (London: Channel 4 Television, 1997), 12–19. The show (one of a series of three) was presented by the well-known newsreader, Angela Rippon, while the umpires were Paddy Griffith, Iain Dickie, and Arthur Harman, all of whom were associated with a subculture within wargaming that had emerged in the 1980s that rejected the use of painted miniatures on the very grounds cited above, and also argued that the ever-more-complex sets of rules by which battles were played were neither delivering historical results nor providing a stimulating intellectual experience. Sadly, even with the copious use of modern graphics to illustrate the troops, weapons, and tactics of the periods concerned, the three pilot episodes were not a success, and the series that they were intended to spearhead was never made. For some of the ideas on which the series was based, see Paddy Griffith, *Paddy Griffith's Napoleonic Wargaming for Fun* (London: Ward Lock, 1980), 94–100.

players taking the part of Napoléon can be told in their initial briefings that, while the Prussian Army is at Wavre, it is showing no signs of marching to Wellington's assistance and appears rather to be pulling out in the direction of Brussels, and thereafter kept firmly under that impression until—*quelle horreur!*—Bülow's corps bursts out of the Bois de Paris in the late afternoon and instantly turns potential victory into near-certain disaster. Setting aside the highly unlikely possibility that he is completely unaware of the events of 18 June 1815, the kriegsspieling Napoléon will know that the Prussians are in reality all too likely to be heading for his right flank with all the speed that they can muster, but, assuming they are worth their salt, the umpires will forestall any moves on his part to stave off disaster by, for example, sending VI Corps to hold the heights of Agiers.<sup>11</sup> Nor is this the only way in which the game is constrained by the parameters of reality: given that the umpires will be judging the situations with which they are confronted on the basis of what the noted military historian, Alfred H. Burne, defined as "inherent military possibility," the unlikely, not to mention the downright incredible, will not usually find any place in the sequence of events.<sup>12</sup>

Herein, however, lies the rub: to function as Reisswitz and his successors intended it to, the system relies on the availability of a team of experienced umpires with a good working knowledge of the battlefield, the course of the campaign, and the art of war in the Napoleonic period. That said, there is no reason why a variant of the method cannot be employed by small groups of gamers or even solo players. In this respect, the key is what has been termed the *variable-length bound*.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in miniatures games and boardgames alike, everything is structured around fixed-length time periods ranging from anything to a minute to a month known variously as *turns*, *moves*, or *bounds*. Let us say, for example, that in a particular set of rules, the duration of the passages concerned is deemed to be five minutes.

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<sup>11</sup> How frequently Waterloo has been refought according to the precepts of free kriegsspiel is unknown, but, according to information received from the author's good friend, Conrad Kinch, the exercise has certainly been undertaken on at least one occasion by the Irish military academy.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred H. Burne, *The Battlefields of England* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Phillip E. Pournelle, "Designing Wargames for the Analytic Purpose," *Phalanx* 50, no. 2 (2017): 48–53.

From this, it will follow that a particular type of unit will normally be able to cover a certain number of yards each time it moves (a figure that can be varied in accordance with the circumstances of ground, formation, and cohesion), and, in the same five minutes, said unit will be able to deliver this, that, or the other amount of firepower. All very logical, it might be thought, but the system is in fact beset by a multitude of problems, not least the fact that the frequent checks that are needed to calculate each unit's remaining fighting strength and current *morale* (a term loosely defined here as its collective state of mind) can take an inordinate amount of time, so much so, indeed, that it is impossible to play through more than two or three moves in the two or three hours that are all that most gamers have to devote to a game. First espoused by veteran gamer, George Jeffrey, in the 1970s, the *variable-length bound* looks to resolve this difficulty by abandoning the tight structures imposed by tradition in favor of a system built around what he called *changes of situation*.<sup>14</sup> Let us say, for example, that a brigade of French dragoons is ordered to attack a brigade of Spanish infantry in some Peninsular War battle. On receipt of the necessary orders (a document presumed to have been passed by the commander of the division in accordance with instructions received from the levels of command higher up the chain, this being a process that will generally be adjudged as having taken anything from 30–60 minutes), the cavalry brigadier at the heart of the action will duly set their troops in motion (or not, as the case may be: a die might be thrown to decide whether the commander complies straight away or queries the wording of what they have received or even refuses to obey altogether), whereupon a decision will be taken as to how long it will take before next change of situation occurs. This being deemed to be, say, the moment when the dragoons are judged to be faced with the reality that they will soon be charging enemy infantry, another decision will be taken to decide whether they press on resolutely in good order or whether they rather pull up in sham-

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<sup>14</sup> G. W. Jeffrey, *George Jeffrey's Tactics and Grand Tactics of the Napoleonic Wars* (Brockton, MA: Courier Publishing, 1982).

bling chaos.<sup>15</sup> At this point, the focus of attention necessarily switches to the Spanish infantry, for they in turn are confronted with the knowledge that they are about to be charged by cavalry. That being the case, assuming that their commander issues the only logical command, namely for each of their units to form square, a die is thrown to see how each battalion responds. Spanish infantry generally being of poor quality and burdened with a long record of defeat, it is resolved by the players that they each have only a one-in-three chance of standing their ground, and the consequence is that the whole brigade turns and runs, leaving the players to resolve whether the dragoons ride in pursuit of the fugitives or reform their ranks ready for further maneuvers, and, in addition, estimate the losses suffered by the two brigades, the one minimal and the other very heavy (even if the dragoons do not pursue, it can be assumed that many of the infantrymen will flee the field).<sup>16</sup>

Battles, of course, are rarely this simple, rather tending to be made up of a series of separate encounters that are acted out both simultaneously and quite separately in different parts of the battlefield. At Waterloo, then, at 1300, Reille's corps was locked in the struggle for Hougomont and Drouet's advancing up the slopes on the other side of the Brussels highway; at 1700, the garrison at La Haye Sainte was endeavoring to fend off wave after wave of French infantry and Mouton's command mounting its desperate attempt to hold the heights of Agiers; and at 1900 the Young Guard fighting hard to defend Plancenoit and its Old and Middle Guard counterparts assaulting Mont Saint-Jean. Players in such a game, then, will necessarily spend much time trying to coordinate what is happening in each of these sub-battles with events elsewhere on the field, this being something that experiments with the system conducted

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<sup>15</sup> As already implied, all such decisions are taken in accordance with a die throw. In this instance, let us say that the dragoons are rated as being troops of good quality and their commander is competent, bold, and popular. Since it can be assumed that they will know that Spanish infantry are not renowned for putting up a fight, a logical resolution might be that the attack will continue on a score of anything but a "one."

<sup>16</sup> Charles J. Esdaile, *The Spanish Army in the Peninsular War* (Nottingham, UK: Partisan Press, 2012), 118–23. For a set of wargames rules based on the principles laid out here, see Scott Sutherland, "Command, Control and Communications: Wargames Rules for the Horse and Musket Period," *Gunner*, newsletter of the St. Enda's Eagles Wargames Club, accessed 22 March 2022.



by the current author in respect of the American Civil War suggested to be extremely difficult (rather than the relatively smooth flow process described with regard to the attack of the dragoon brigade described above, in a game that sought to recreate the whole of such battles as Medellín or Ocaña in 1809, it would be all too likely to be a much more spasmodic affair given the need to take stock of the activities of other units of both armies to the dragoons' left or right). One arrives at the enormous difficulty inherent in any attempt to recreate a large battle on the tabletop; once again, the moral is that the exercise can be undertaken, but only at the cost of such an administrative and logistical burden that the result is likely to be at the very least much frustration.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there is the issue of the players' emotional satisfaction: the tiny blocks of 2-mm figures for which the Jeffrey system was designed simply do not engage the imagination in the same way as lovingly painted regiments of 15-mm or 25-mm miniatures, composed though these might be of a mere 20 men. As one experienced wargamer mused after testing the scale,

There was something lacking compared to my 6mm games with the General de Brigade family of rules. Over the past few years I have got used to seeing everything from battalions through to divisions fighting for survival or performing heroic feats of arms. It's probably the fact that I have always struggled to really enjoy element based games as they tend to feel more like boardgames. In this game, as it progressed I started to look at each base merely as a counter with a value rather than the formation it was supposed to represent.<sup>18</sup>

From all this, one is forced back to the conclusion that, if conventional wargames figures are to play any part in refighting Waterloo, it must necessarily be at the micro level. One possibility here is that of the *skirmish game*, a genre of the wargames family in which a small number of miniatures—usually no more than 20 but sometimes as

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<sup>17</sup> For the rules used by the author in his experiments, see Cliff Knight and Peter Dennis, *American Civil War: Rules for an Army-Level Wargame with 2mm or 6mm Figures* (n.p.: Raider Games, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> Jon Bleasdale, "2mm Napoleonic Test Battle: 'Austria, 1809,'" *Grymauch's Solo Wargaming Blog*, 18 October 2019.

few as 6—each of them representing one real officer or person, are used to act out the experiences of an equally limited group of combatants in the context of clashes at best lasting a few minutes. Properly managed, this method can provide a useful, if abstract, insight into the manner in which battle is experienced by the individual soldier, and there is no doubt that Waterloo offers a host of situations that lend themselves to the exercise (one might think here of the low-level skirmishing that raged for much of the afternoon along the hedgerows surrounding the farm of Papelotte).<sup>19</sup> The result can be exciting, certainly—imagine, for example, a game pitting the doomed commander of the Union Brigade, Sir William Ponsonby, and a handful of Royal Scots Greys against a vengeful troop of enemy lancers—while the cost in terms of time and money of fielding the forces involved is unlikely to pose much in the way of difficulty. But playing out such combats is not likely to offer many lessons with regard to the outcome of the battle as a whole. Far better, then, to adopt the intermediate approach touched on in chapter 1 of concentrating on one episode of the battle only, this being an exercise that is most likely to take place at the level of the brigade or the division.

For the remainder of this chapter, this possibility will be explored. In doing so, however, we must first accept that to do so is to sacrifice another cherished instinct of the wargames community. Thus, most gamers want to see a plethora of units on the battlefield. With regard to the “horse-and-musket” period, in general, this will imply the presence of the major combat arms—infantry, cavalry, and artillery (after all, did not success on the battlefield depend on the interaction of all three?)—while, with regard to the Napoleonic period in particular, the colorful nature of the uniforms and the widely differing nature of the units that took the field cannot but spark off a desire for further elaboration: it will not be enough for a French Army just to have a force of cavalry, for example; rather, it must have at least one regiment of hussars, another of dragoons, and yet another of cuiras-

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<sup>19</sup> For an introduction to skirmish wargaming, see Donald Featherstone, *Skirmish Wargaming* (London: Stephens College, 1975); and John Lambshead, *One-Hour Skirmish Wargames: Fast-Play Dice-less Rules for Small-unit Actions from Napoleonic to Sci-Fi* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2018). Useful for the Napoleonic period, in particular, is Mark Latham, *Chosen Men: Military Skirmish Games in the Napoleonic Wars* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2016).

siers. The result is twofold: first, cost pressures tending toward units composed of an ever-smaller number of figures, and, second, armies supposedly representing divisions whose orders of battle are wildly unrealistic, even ridiculous; in the case of the imaginary French Army mentioned above, its three disparate cavalry regiments are likely to be joined by three or four battalions of line infantry, a battalion of the Old Guard, a battery of horse artillery, and a battery of foot artillery, when, in reality, Napoléon's divisions consisted of one type of infantryman or cavalryman alone, albeit with the addition of a battery of foot or horse artillery as appropriate.<sup>20</sup>

If we are genuinely going to operate at the level of the division or the brigade, then, the first job is to shed the desire for variety in that the rival forces will be composed wholly of just one type of infantry or cavalry with maybe a single battery of cannon attached in support. Nor is this the only step-change that will be required. Thus, to avoid being tied into a ground-scale that will necessarily limit the forces on each side to no more than a battalion, the problems detailed in chapter 1 will mean that all thought of including Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, or Papelotte on the battlefield will also have to be set aside: what is required will rather be an area of the battlefield that is devoid of anything but the most basic terrain features and, in addition, as flat as possible (unless the gamer is blessed with a sand table, hills and valleys are all but impossible to reproduce for wargames purposes). Insofar as Waterloo is concerned, this makes the choices somewhat limited, the only possibilities that come to mind being the desperate efforts of the French cavalry to break Wellington's center-right on the gentle slopes in the lee of Mont Saint-Jean or the first stage of the climactic attack mounted by elements of the grenadiers and chasseurs of the Imperial Guard in what proved to be the closing moments of the battle. As will be recalled from chapter 2, this struck the Anglo-Dutch lines in three waves at three different points, but, of these, both the second and the third came forward in sectors where slopes were a significant factor in the terrain, whereas the first advanced directly along the land bridge connecting the French ridge with its British counterpart and therefore never had to contend with

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<sup>20</sup> For a concise introduction to French military organization, see Col H. C. B. Rogers, *Napoleon's Army* (London: Ian Allen, 1974).

anything other than level ground. Given that it was such a moment of high drama—in many British accounts, indeed, the moment when the battle was decided—it is the latter on which our choice will fall, this being a preference strengthened by the fact that the clash was one of remarkable simplicity, neither side deploying skirmishers or being supported by cavalry or artillery. Meanwhile, what we also see is a classic example of the clash between column and line, something that has traditionally been seen as a deciding issue in the struggle between the British and the French, not just at Waterloo, but also in the Peninsular War.<sup>21</sup>

Before moving on to a wargame based on the events concerned, for obvious reasons, it is first necessary to go into some detail about what they actually embraced. As laid out in chapter 2, around 1900 in the evening, Napoléon sent 10 of the 13 battalions of guard infantry, each of them some 500-strong, that by now constituted his only reserve to strike Wellington's army in the sector immediately to the left of the Brussels highway; at their head, meanwhile, rode Marshal Ney who had already repeatedly justified his reputation as “the bravest of the brave” many times over. For reasons that we do not know but were probably the result of a combination of poorly written orders, confusion on the part of the officers, the dense smoke that shrouded the battlefield, and inequalities in the configuration of the terrain, the troops drifted apart: while the first three battalions advanced directly to the left of the highway, four more headed along the land bridge and the last three struck off in the direction of Hougomont before swinging back and moving along the western declivity of the latter feature.<sup>22</sup>

Aided, perhaps, by the fact that they advanced over level ground that may have been rather better drained than the boggy hollows to

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<sup>21</sup> For two useful discussions of Napoleonic battlefield tactics, see Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* (London: Yale University Press, 1998); and Brent Nosworthy, *Battle Tactics of Napoleon and His Enemies* (New York: Constable and Robinson, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> The exact orders given to the commanders of the attacking forces do not appear to have survived, but that something went wrong is suggested by the fact that, in the midst of the action, Napoléon, who was watching events unfold from his command post at La Belle Alliance, sent an aide de camp to Ney to remonstrate with him, only for the latter to be told that, the troops being fully committed, there was no way that any of them could now be redeployed. Paul L. Dawson, *Waterloo: The Truth at Last—Why Napoleon Lost the Great Battle* (Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2018), 365.

either side, the four battalions that took advantage of the land bridge (the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 3d Regiment of Chasseurs and the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 4th Regiment of Chasseurs) made much better time than their fellows, and the consequence was that they were soon well in the lead.<sup>23</sup> As the four units advanced in line abreast, each of them in column of companies, they came under artillery fire, but by this stage in the day many of the Anglo-Dutch batteries were running short of ammunition, some of them even having left the field, and there seem to have been comparatively few casualties.<sup>24</sup> Even more encouraging, meanwhile, was the fact that the way ahead seemed wide open, the only troops who were discernible at all being some redcoats—in reality, the remnants of the much battered brigade of General Sir Colin Halkett—huddled around their colors on the extreme right of the chasseurs' line of march.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted here that, despite the constant references to the Old Guard in the historiography, along with another 4 of the 10 battalions involved in the attack, the 3d and 4th Regiments of Chasseurs both belonged to the Middle Guard, a much less prestigious formation raised in 1815 on the basis of men demobilized in 1814 who had now returned to the ranks. Thrown together in little more than a month, they had perforce been clad in whatever came to hand, something that seemingly did not include any of the famous bearskins that had traditionally characterized the grenadiers and chasseurs. Also lacking was the cohesion and esprit de corps present in many other French units. Herein lies a great irony, for the 1st Footguards were awarded the title Grenadier Guards and given their characteristic bearskins in recognition of their gallantry, when they were actually fighting men who were chasseurs rather than grenadiers and clad in a variety of shakos and forage caps rather than anything more exotic.

<sup>24</sup> There is some discussion on this point, but the most recent consensus is that, while the attacking troops did not escape unscathed, their losses were certainly not sufficient to check the pace of their attack or disorder their ranks. That said, moving, as they were, along the crest of the ridge dividing the battlefield, the men of the 3d and 4th Chasseurs would have been far more visible than those pressing forward in the lower ground to left and right.

<sup>25</sup> While there is general agreement on the manner in which the battalions involved in the attack split into three separate detachments, there has been much argument in respect of the formations in which they advanced. Thus, following a number of French sources that describe them being formed *en carré* (in square), several accounts have insisted that the troops advanced in square, but, it being very difficult even for well-trained troops to move in square, let alone charge the enemy, this is inherently implausible: in consequence, either the French authors concerned were using the term loosely in the sense of *blocks*—a term that could well serve to describe an attack column—or they were telling untruths in the hope of explaining away the failure of the attack. For an interesting discussion, see John Hussey, *Waterloo: The Campaign of 1815*, vol. 2, *From Waterloo to the Restoration of Peace in Europe* (London: Greenhill Books, 2017), 226–33.

## *The March of the Miniatures*

However, the way was not empty: far from it indeed. Thus, in precisely the sector of the line for which the chasseurs were heading, the Ohain road was embanked along its northern side for several hundred yards, the result being that it provided a useful piece of cover for the troops stationed there, namely the brigade of Foot Guards commanded by Sir Peregrine Maitland. Only two battalions strong though this was (the units concerned were the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 1st Foot Guards), it consisted of some of the best troops in Wellington's army and had thus far suffered comparatively little in the battle. Strengthening their morale still further, meanwhile, was the fact that just a few yards to the rear was the reassuring figure of the Duke of Wellington, the Anglo-Dutch commander having unerringly ridden straight to the point of crisis. Mounted, as ever, on his steed, Copenhagen, he now took personal charge of the situation, the result being one of the most famous orders in the history of the British Army: "Now, Maitland: now's your time." Springing to their feet in a formation that was four ranks deep rather than the usual two, the guardsmen leveled their muskets, which had been charged and primed long since, and delivered a deadly volley. What happened next is described by Lieutenant Henry W. Powell:

Whether it was from the sudden and unexpected appearance of a corps so near them, which must have seemed as starting out of the ground, or the tremendously heavy fire we threw at them, *la garde* . . . suddenly stopped. Those who . . . could see the affair tell us that the effect of our fire seemed to force the head of the column bodily back. In less than a minute above 300 were down.<sup>26</sup>

The men treated to this traumatic experience were those of the two battalions of the 4th Chasseurs, these being left, not just decimated, but deprived of more than half their leaders: of the 25 officers present on the field, 2 were killed and 11 more wounded.<sup>27</sup> With the momen-

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<sup>26</sup> H. T. Siborne, ed., *Waterloo Letters: A Selection from Original and Hitherto Unpublished Letters Bearing on the Operations of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth of June 1815* (London: Cassell, 1891), 255.

<sup>27</sup> Dawson, *Waterloo: The Truth at Last*, 361. Key to the success of this volley was the fact that men placed in such a fashion as the Foot Guards were likely not just to have

tum of the assault irrevocably checked, the company commanders still on their feet tried desperately to get their men into line, but, as some of the latter recovered their equilibrium, so the disorder was increased by the ragged discharges with which they responded to their adversaries. However, attempts to reform and resort to fire were, alike, futile: no sooner had Maitland's men fired their pieces than their officers led them forward in a bayonet charge. This was the end. As an anonymous sergeant afterward remembered, "As we approached, [they] faced about and fled for their lives in all directions. . . . They ran very fast, but many of them fell while we pursued, and, with them, one stand of colours."<sup>28</sup> Rather more prolix, Ensign Rees H. Gronow recalls,

We were instantly on our legs, and, after so many hours of inaction and irritation at maintaining a purely defensive attitude, all the time suffering the loss of comrades and friends, the spirit which animated officers and men may easily be imagined. After firing a volley as soon as the enemy were within shot, we rushed on with fixed bayonets and that hearty hurrah peculiar to British soldiers. . . . The impetuosity of our men seemed almost to paralyse their enemies: I witnessed several . . . who were run through the body without any resistance on their part.<sup>29</sup>

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their muskets already loaded but to have charged and primed them at some moment of relative tranquillity when the enemy were still well out of range; the reason this was important being that the soldiers were able to devote more time and care to the process and thereby ensure that their weapons were less likely to misfire.

<sup>28</sup> *Some Particulars of the Battle at Waterloo in a Letter from a Serjeant [sic] in the Guards* (London: J. and T. Clarke, 1816), 6. The tactics made use of by Maitland's brigade are a textbook example of a means of dealing with French attacks in column that had been developed in the Peninsular War. According to the traditional view, such assaults were doomed by the fact that, formed in line, the defenders could bring far more weapons to bear than their opponents, with the French being driven back through the exploitation of this advantage via the delivery of repeated volleys of musketry. While this does seem to have occurred on some occasions, however, it is now argued that, in order to keep casualties to a minimum, French attacks were rather met by a single crushing volley delivered at the closest possible range followed by a bayonet charge. See Paddy Griffith, *Forward into Battle: Fighting Tactics from Waterloo to Vietnam* (Chichester, UK: A. Bird, 1981), 12–42.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Fletcher and Ron Poulter, *Gentlemen's Sons: The Guards in the Peninsula and at Waterloo, 1808–1815* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Spellmount, 1992), 234.

## *The March of the Miniatures*

So much for the 4th Chasseurs. Meanwhile, their neighbors in the 3d Chasseurs were also being very roughly handled. Exactly what happened here is far less clear, but one thing that is certain is that the French were not taken by surprise in the same manner as the troops that faced Maitland. Moreover, unlike the latter's brigade, the defenders—the four battalions of line infantry that made up the command of Colin Halkett, all of them drawn up, like the Foot Guards, four deep—were very raw troops, while they had been so roughly handled at Quatre Bras that the survivors had to be reconstituted as two ad hoc formations, of which one was composed of the 2 battalions of the 30th and 73d Regiments of Foot and the other of the 2d Battalion of the 69th Regiment of Foot and the single-battalion 33d Regiment of Foot. As if all this was not enough, meanwhile, the battalion commanders included one of the most ineffectual officers in Wellington's entire army in the person of William Elphinstone, whose later rise to the rank of general ended in the all too predictable disaster of the first Anglo-Afghan War (1839–42). It was, then, very much to their credit that the part of the brigade that found itself caught up in the attack—the 33d/69th Foot—did not turn and run at the first sight of the chasseurs as they emerged from the smoke little more than 100 yards away, what made this still more creditable being the fact that the French artillery initially had much more effect than it had done in the case of the Foot Guards. Present with the remnants of the 69th Foot was Captain George Barlow. As he wrote of his battalion's opponents,

These fellows came up with carried arms in the most determined manner to within seventy or eighty yards and opened a most terrible fire. Two pieces of cannon accompanied them, and, being opposite our brigade, raked it severely with grape-shot as did the shells from some distant howitzers. This was indeed the crisis of this most eventful day.<sup>30</sup>

The reference to the cannon is interesting as it suggests that the French attack was a more involved affair than sometimes appears.

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<sup>30</sup> Edward Owen, *The Tavistock Papers: Waterloo and Beyond* (Tavistock, UK: AQ and DJ Publications, 1997), 42.



That said, the guns concerned do not appear to have done much to save the infantry, and all the more so as an account from the unit next in line to the right (the 1st Battalion of the 3d Regiment of Grenadiers) suggests that they were soon put out of action by British fire.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, if the 3d Chasseurs were not hit by one spectacular volley in the style of the 4th Chasseurs, the regiment still suffered heavy casualties, only 5 of its 28 officers surviving the battle without being killed or wounded. Also down, meanwhile, was the brigade commander, General Claude-Étienne Michel, who, having chosen to ride at the head of the 4th Chasseurs, was mortally wounded by a ball that struck his right arm and then penetrated his body.<sup>32</sup>

What makes these terrible casualties all the more tragic from the French point of view is that, had the 3d Chasseurs pressed on rather than halting to open fire, they might well have broken through and thereby turned Maitland's left flank, for Halkett's brigade was barely in a condition to fight, and in fact collapsed altogether when it was struck a few minutes later by the troops who had advanced parallel to the Brussels highway.<sup>33</sup> Why the mistake was made was unclear, but one possibility is that the French tactical regulations laid down that columns were a formation designed for maneuver only and, in consequence, that units so formed should deploy into line as soon as they encountered any resistance, and another that the deadly volley that felled so many of the 4th Chasseurs sapped the regiment's offensive spirit and caused the men to halt in confusion.<sup>34</sup> However, whatever

<sup>31</sup> See Andrew Field, "La Garde recule!: Napoleon's Last Throw of the Dice," in *Waterloo: The Decisive Victory*, ed. by Col Nick Lipscombe (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2015), 321.

<sup>32</sup> Dawson, *Waterloo: The Truth at Last*, 358–61. Given that the only Anglo-Dutch troops faced by the 3d Chasseurs were constituted by a single line battalion that had already suffered heavy casualties, it is difficult not to suspect that at least some of the casualties were inflicted either in the course of the advance or in the retreat that followed. There is, however, another possibility, namely that the 33d Foot and 2d Battalion, 69th Foot, were only confronted by a single battalion of the chasseurs, the latter's fellow rather coming up against the left-hand battalion of the Foot Guards, an idea that is rendered at least somewhat plausible by the fact that many older accounts insist that it was the 3d Chasseurs, rather than the 4th Chasseurs, that was routed by Maitland's men.

<sup>33</sup> Field, "La Garde recule!," 324.

<sup>34</sup> The issue of column versus line is one that has given rise to much debate, albeit more with regard to the Peninsular War than Waterloo. Thus, seemingly concerned to defend the reputation of Napoléon's army from charges that it clung unthinkingly to notions of impetus and the bayonet, one school of thought continues to insist that,

the reason, the mangled remnants of the 33d Regiment and the 2d Battalion of the 69th Regiment were left free to trade volleys with the chasseurs, the contest continuing until the latter, finding its left uncovered by the destruction of their sister regiment, fled in disorder in their turn.<sup>35</sup>

As can be imagined, this narrative offers considerable potential for the figure wargamer. With only seven battalions involved, the number of models needed is not unreasonable, while, depending on the scale in use, the action would almost fit on a coffee table. To speak in this fashion, however, is to speak in terms of the highly traditional approach constituted by a figure scale of, say, 1:33 and a ground scale of 1mm to 1 yard. Unfortunately, for the reasons already noted, this produces a number of distortions, and for the purposes of his own attempt to recreate the clash, the author chose rather to go for both

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as laid out above, French infantry were meant only to use columns for maneuver, the idea being that they should deploy into line as soon as they came to grips with the enemy. For example, see James R. Arnold, "A Reappraisal of Column versus Line in the Peninsular War," *Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 535–52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2004.0006>. However, the plain truth is that the argument makes no sense whatsoever. In brief, if French infantry approached the enemy in column, it is clear that the intention was for them to keep going and break the enemy by means of shock action, for deploying into line at the last minute could not but open the units concerned to a disastrous counterattack. As in the case of the two battalions of the 4th Chasseurs, a decision might well be taken to attempt to form line, but this would only have been after all forward movement had been checked by enemy fire. For a very good example of how catastrophic trying to form line from column within musket shot of the enemy, one has only to consider the fate of the divisions of Gen Jean-Baptiste Girard and Gen Honoré-Théodore-Maxime Gazan at the Battle of Albuera (16 May 1811). See Guy C. Dempsey, *Albuera, 1811: The Bloodiest Battle of the Peninsular War* (Barnsley, UK: Greenhill Books, 2008), 115–18.

<sup>35</sup> Exactly what happened to the 3d Chasseurs is unclear, with none of the standard historical accounts having anything to say about the fate of the regiment. Glover suggests that it fell back in good order, but if this were the case, it is clear that the men did not retain their cohesion for very long, rather dissolving a mass of fugitives. As for the 33d Foot and 2d Battalion, 69th Foot, we have just as little information; the one account that we have that goes into detail—that of George Barlow of the latter unit—studiously avoiding making clear what the unit actually did. Admittedly, a letter sent to William Siborne in 1835 by a Lt Anderson fiercely denies any suggestion that the regiment retreated or that any part of the Anglo-Dutch line fell back at all, but the value of this testimony is much weakened by the fact that the officer concerned confessed that he was wounded at the moment that the Chasseurs came up with the defenders and for some time thereafter was left lying unconscious. See H. Anderson to W. Siborne, 18 November 1835, in *Waterloo Letters*, 338. The accounts that we have from the 33d Foot being equally unhelpful, the matter must remain a mystery.

units that are much larger than the norm and a ground scale that is, at the very least, more in tune with the height of the miniatures. In line with this purpose, an appropriate force was recruited from the sheets of paper figures marketed by PaperBattles.com (see chapter 1, footnote 29), the size chosen of the two alternatives on offer being 10mm.<sup>36</sup> The men coming in blocks of 60 (two ranks of 30 for the British, and three ranks of 20 for the French), it was felt that four would be enough to represent a battalion, the result being a figure scale of as few as 1:3; in addition, personality figures could also be introduced to represent Wellington, Maitland, and Michel, but this is by no means absolutely necessary (in the game played out below, their presence was factored in rather than physically represented). As for the ground scale, this follows neatly from the frontage occupied by the regiments concerned on the model battlefield. Thus, in reality, a British infantry battalion of 600 men arrayed in a two-deep line would have taken up a space of around 300 yards, and so, given that its model counterpart takes up around 15 inches, we can say that 1 inch on the tabletop is equivalent to 10 yards.

With the basics established and the various units required readied to take the field, we can move on to a decision in respect of which set of wargames rules should be employed. Insofar as these last are concerned, the choice is overwhelming, and all the more so at the level at which we are operating; according to one doubtless incomplete list, at the time it was compiled, there were no fewer than 49 sets in print and another 17 that had previously been and gone.<sup>37</sup> Without first having played any given set, it is hard to make a judgment on either how they play or the extent to which they deliver a historical result, but there are extensive reviews on the many websites dedicated to wargaming, while two that the author has found particularly usable

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<sup>36</sup> Resorting to paper figures leads to a massive reduction in the cost of assembling an army, while the time needed for preparation is also cut to a minimum, all that is needed being a little skill with scissors, glue, and craft knife. Nor do the results look unreasonable, a very good impression being created of masses of troops as seen at a distance. All this said, there is, in fact, no need to make use of figures at all: simple cardboard counters cut to the right size and painted red or blue would be perfectly acceptable as an alternative.

<sup>37</sup> For said list, see "In Print," *Napoleonics: Historical Rules, Napoleonic Warfare, Miniatures Page*, accessed 29 March 2022.

are *General de Brigade* and *Playable Napoleonic Wargames*.<sup>38</sup> However, both of these publications are designed for use with miniatures, and so, not least because they are based on the use of blocks of figures in the style of those described above, preference will here be given to those developed for divisional-level actions by the late lamented Paddy Griffith for the purposes of his already-mentioned *Napoleonic Wargaming for Fun* (the book also contains suggestions for wargaming at the level of the individual soldier, the brigade, and the army).<sup>39</sup> One of the most thoughtful and innovative figures ever to have graced the wargames community, Griffith believed that the keys to writing rules were the linked concepts of clarity of intention—an appreciation of exactly what was needed for the replication of the problems operative at whatever level of command the tabletop gamer was aiming at—and simplicity of process. To quote from his introduction:

It is . . . extremely important to prevent . . . rules from becoming over-complex, thereby sacrificing playability to realism. Napoleonic commanders did not have to be mathematical wizards to win their wars, nor did barrack-room lawyers often rise to high command. We must therefore steer well clear of pedantry and concentrate firmly upon general command decision-making. Many wargamers fail to achieve the right balance in all this, and either become obsessed with minor details . . . or go to the opposite extreme, and reject any claim to realism at all in the name of playability. Neither of these approaches is [necessary] since it is perfectly possible to devise games which are both realistic and playable. To do this, however, you must be clear about

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<sup>38</sup> Full details are as follows: David C. R. Brown, *General de Brigade: Wargaming the Age of Napoleon at Brigade Level* (Leigh-on-Sea, UK: Partizan Press, 1998); and Barry Edwards, *Playable Napoleonic Wargames* (Nottingham, UK: self-published, 1987). If such sets of rules are used to fight the battle described below, players are advised to form battalions of either 18–24 or 36–48 figures and to adopt a different ground scale. In terms of miniatures, they will find that the 6-mm figures manufactured by Heroics and Ros and other manufacturers are for many different reasons preferable to their 15-mm or 25-mm brethren.

<sup>39</sup> As an alternative, readers might care to consider Neil Thomas, *Napoleonic Wargaming* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2009), containing a set of rules making use of the same four-stand battalions favored by Griffith.

just what level of realism you are after, [and] through whose eyes you are trying to look at the battle.<sup>40</sup>

Quite so, but, albeit without specifying as much, in much the same way as George Jeffrey, Griffith was also convinced that the action of a game should concentrate on the decisive clash, in brief, the moment when two rival forces came face to face with one another and strove to exert their physical and moral superiority. What we have, then, is a system that is ideally suited to recreate the attack of the 3d and 4th Chasseurs. Insofar as this is concerned, all that is required is a flat surface measuring around 4 feet wide by 3 feet deep, the whole of the action taking place on the broad plateau currently occupied by the Lion Mound and the Hameau du Lion and the ridge stretching from there across the battlefield to La Belle Alliance. For the look of the thing, the gamer might want to represent the Ohain road with suitably painted strips of card, but otherwise no scenery is needed whatsoever. As for the game system, as witness the following account, it, too, is characterized above all by simplicity. To commence, the seven infantry battalions engaged in the action were laid out in two lines parallel to one another at a distance of approximately 16 inches (reading from the left in each case, 33d/69th Foot, 3d Battalion of the 1st Foot Guard, and 2d Battalion of the 1st Foot Guard; 2d Battalion of the 4th Chasseurs, 1st Battalion of the 4th Chasseurs, 1st Battalion of 3d Chasseurs, and 2d Battalion of the 3d Chasseurs) and each one assigned a value reflecting their experience, training, and current state of morale, namely five in the case of the two Foot Guard units, four in that of the four chasseur units, and two in that of the 33d/69th Foot. With regard to formations, meanwhile, the chasseurs were arrayed in four ranks of one stand apiece, and the British troops in two of two stands apiece.

This done, the action commenced, all four of the French battalions advancing the full 11 inches (110 yards) allotted by the rules to columns moving over difficult ground, the Foot Guards in the meantime being deemed to spend the move jumping to their feet, forming their ranks, and cocking their muskets. All the time, meanwhile, the artillery of both sides are assumed to be pounding away at the oppos-

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<sup>40</sup> Griffith, *Napoleonic Wargaming for Fun*, 11.

## *The March of the Miniatures*

ing forces, but with little in the way of effect, the Anglo-Dutch because relatively few batteries were still in action and the French because hardly any of their guns were in a position to inflict much damage on the defenders. Assuming that they deployed in line, the 33d/69th Foot could in theory have been firing at the enemy in front of them (i.e., the 3d Chasseurs), but so thick was the smoke that hung over the battlefield by this time that it was deemed that the approaching columns could not be discerned by the British infantry until the last moment. With the opposing forces now just 5 inches (50 yards) from one another, they were deemed to be embroiled in a close combat, such actions being handled by Griffith in such a manner as to elide musketry and bayonet charges. Ordinarily, the first step in resolving such situations would be for each attacking and defending unit alike to take a morale test to assess whether their readiness to take matters to conclusions holds firm in the presence of the enemy, the test concerned consisting of rolling a 10-sided die of the sort widely available from fantasy-gaming retail outlets, and attempting to score two or above for a unit with a classification of five, three for a unit with a classification of four, four for a unit with a classification of three, and five for a classification of two. In the case of the two battalions of the 3d Chasseurs, the Foot Guards and the 33d/69th Foot, this procedure is duly carried out, all concerned passing with flying colors, but, in that of the 4th Chasseurs, the shock of seeing the way ahead suddenly blocked by two enemy battalions is deemed to be so profound that they are declared to be “shaken,” a status that cannot but gravely weaken their morale and capacity to defend themselves. The results of the three combats that were now fought out were then determined by a series of die throws that are again laid down by the rules. In brief, each unit begins with a fighting value set at five for the Foot Guards, four for the chasseurs (in this case halved to two because of the state of disorder into which they had fallen), and two for the 33d/69th Foot, to which a series of adjustments are made in accordance with the tactical situation, although only a very few are in operation in this case: in brief, the two Foot Guard battalions both get a plus-one because they are counterattacking rather than just passively holding their positions, and a plus-one because of the close proximity of Wellington; the two battalions of the 3d Chasseurs a plus-one because they are pressing home their attack; and the 2d Battalion, 3d

Chasseurs, a plus-one because of the presence of Michel. Final values having been arrived at—2d Battalion, 1st Foot Guard seven; 1st Battalion, 3d Chasseurs five; 2d Battalion, 3d Chasseurs six; 1st Battalion, 4th Chasseurs, 2d Battalion, 4th Chasseurs, and 33d/69th Foot two—and, where more than one unit is involved on the same side, added together, another 10-sided die was thrown for each of the three contests that were taking place (2d Battalion, 1st Foot Guard, versus 2d Battalion, 4th Chasseurs; 3d Battalion, 1st Foot Guard, versus 1st Battalion, 4th Chasseurs; 1st and 2d Battalion, 3d Chasseurs, versus 33d/69th Foot) to produce a chance factor that can lead from a variety of percentages ranging from 400 down to nothing at all being added to the score of each contender. Setting aside the vagaries of chance, the results were much as to be expected, with the 2d Battalion, 4th Chasseurs, being worsted by 30 points to 5; the 1st Battalion, 4th Chasseurs, by 12 points to 4; and the 33d/69th Foot by 11 points to 4; and all that now remained was to arrive at the final result. In line with the rules, the three beaten units were deemed to withdraw a full move in a state of disorder and their vanquishers to move forward 5 inches (50 yards), while a final die was thrown to assess the casualties, namely a reduction from a status of four to one of two in the case of that of the two battalions of the 4th Chasseurs, and from one of two to one of one in that of the 33d/69th Foot, this last unit being deemed as being so badly hit as to be incapable of being restored to order.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, what we have, then, is a system that reproduces the assault of the chasseur brigade of the Middle Guard in a manner that is both spritely—the action took the author less than 15 minutes to fight through to a finish—and accurate. Thus, taken by surprise by two of the best units in Wellington's army, it would have been quite extraordinary for the 4th Chasseurs to have prevailed, just as it would have been equally extraordinary for the 33d/69th Foot to have held its ground altogether, the wargame therefore producing an outcome that mirrored the situation that almost certainly pertained in reality. So far, so good, but the fact that the exercise that we have conducted in this chapter was a success does not release wargaming with figures from the bind in which it is placed by its many restrictions. That the

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<sup>41</sup> For the full rules on which this recreation is based, see Griffith, *Napoleonic Wargaming for Fun*, 30–57.

## *The March of the Miniatures*

miniatures game will always have its attraction the author would be the last to deny, for, as one textbook puts it, “An imperfect image, of course, but a wargames table is the only place where you can actually see a Roman legion getting ready to receive a barbarian charge, Zulus rushing a British square, the New Model Army facing the Cavaliers, the Eighth Army advancing, or the full panoply of the Napoleonic era.”<sup>42</sup> Even if there is a touch of exaggeration here, the appeal of assembling beautifully painted armies of metal or plastic figures cannot be denied, and again, certainly not by the current author. However, in the end, the games played using such figures cannot but remain just that, namely games, experiences that are, indeed, in the most proper sense of the word, ludicrous. If the aim is intellectual satisfaction and, above all, simulation, what is needed is a different medium, and thus it is that we will spend the rest of this work looking at the board wargame.

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<sup>42</sup> George Gush and Andrew Finch, *A Guide to Wargaming* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 16.



Chapter 3



*Photo courtesy of John Haines*

French line infantry mount the slopes of Mont Saint-Jean in a large-scale recreation of the battle.



*Photo courtesy of Michael Hughes*

Polish Lancers of the guard sally forth to take on Wellington's infantry.

*The March of the Miniatures*



*Photo courtesy of Gareth Lane*  
Riflemen of the King's German Legion's 2d Light Battalion. It was this unit that provided the garrison of La Haye Sainte.



*Photo courtesy of Gareth Lane*  
Prussian dragoons.



*Photo courtesy of tabletopgaming.co.uk*

A scene from a refight of Waterloo staged at the University of Glasgow in June 2019 that is reputed to be the largest wargame ever fought. To facilitate access for the 100 or more players who took part, the battlefield was split longitudinally into four separate tables and troops transferred laterally from one to the other as required.

## *The March of the Miniatures*



*Photo courtesy of Phil M*

The Union Brigade pour into action past some of the Portuguese troops who Wellington initially hoped to have under his command at Waterloo.



*Photo courtesy of tabletopgaming.co.uk*

British and German troops defend Hougomont in the course of the “greatest game.”



*Photo courtesy of Stephen is Painting*

Hanoverian landwehr on the advance.

*The March of the Miniatures*



French infantry in column.

*Photo courtesy of Greg the Artist*



*Photo courtesy of @oldwargamer*  
Though Napoléon spent much of the day of Waterloo on horseback, he escaped from the battle in his coach.

Chapter 3



Grenadiers of the Old Guard.

*Photo courtesy of @oldwargamer*



Two soldiers of the Black Watch defy the enemy in traditional fashion.

*Photo courtesy of @oldwargamer*

## *The March of the Miniatures*



*Author's collection*

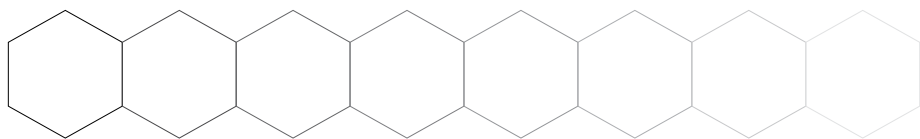
The 3d and 4th Chasseurs of the Guard bear down on Maitland's brigade and the composite battalion formed from the 33d and 69th Foot. The cardboard blocks featured here lack the beauty and spectacle of the model soldiers shown in this chapter, but they offer manifold advantages.



*Author's collection*

Shocked by, first, the sudden emergence of Maitland's brigade from the shelter of the embankment beside the Ohain road, and, second, a devastating volley of musketry at close range followed by a bayonet charge, the two battalions of the 4th Chasseurs reel back in confusion; on the British left, however, the already badly shaken composite battalion formed from the 33d and the 69th Foot is routed and flees headlong.





## Chapter 4

# How Many Hexes to Hougoumont?

## *Waterloo by Board Game*

From all that has been said, then, it is clear that board games are at the very least a useful tool for the analysis of both particular historical actions and campaigns and the feasibility and likely outcome of military operations that as yet remain confined to the realms of planning, theoretical or otherwise. How, though, have their techniques been applied to the campaigns of 1815? Insofar as this question is concerned, we must return to the estimable Charles Roberts. Published in 1958, the first historical game produced by Avalon Hill featured the Battle of Gettysburg, but it was not long before this was supplemented by one on the Hundred Days, namely the board game *Waterloo* (1962). This is generally agreed to be a classic in terms of balance and playability, and more than 50 years on it is still widely played and provokes intense discussion in the wargames press, the archives of Avalon Hill's *The General* being littered with such articles as "Waterloo Defense," "Brussels by 20 June," and "Seven Steps to Waterloo: Strategy and Tactics on the Defensive."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it was, as one leading commentator has written, "the spiritual progenitor of all . . . Napoleonic-era simulations."<sup>2</sup> However, in terms of historical accuracy, it was distinctly lacking: artillery, for example, could only

<sup>1</sup> Compare to "Waterloo (1962)," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 28 August 2014. For a dedicated site, see "Game Analysis: 'Waterloo'—Part I: The Strategic Situation and Battle Area," *Map and Counters* (blog), accessed 3 September 2014. So taken were some gamers with the package that they constructed a giant replica of the board and replaced the cardboard counters with groups of figures chosen to represent particular regiments. See F. P. Burk, "Lurching Towards Mont Saint Jean: A Pilgrim's Progress in Wargames Design," *Wargames Illustrated*, no. 18 (February 1987): 46–47.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Freeman, *The Complete Book of Board Wargames* (New York: Fireside, 1980), 134.

be used in close assault rather than being used to bombard the enemy at long range, while combat was exceptionally bloody, there having been cases of Napoléon riding off to occupy Brussels at the head of a single unit of cavalry. At the same time, despite its name, the game models not the actual battle but rather the full four-day campaign.<sup>3</sup> This last is not true of the next game to appear in the same mold, but it was not much of an improvement in historical terms. Put together by James Dunnigan (who designed games for Avalon Hill and in 1970 founded its great rival, Simulations Publications Incorporated [universally known as SPI]), and issued from 1971 onward as an introductory game to subscribers to SPI's house magazine, *Strategy and Tactics*, this was titled *Napoleon at Waterloo* and built on the structures established by *Waterloo* and its fellows. Crucially, artillery could now fire at long range, the net result, for reasons that need not detain us here, being that it became much easier to follow the standard Napoleonic technique of concentrating an overwhelming superiority of forces on a single point in a defensive line; conversely, in a manner that was followed by many more complex offerings, including, not least, *Napoleon's Last Battles*, artillery used the same combat results table as everything else, the result being a strange anomaly in which, in complete defiance of reality, the denser a target was, the safer it was from bombardment. As in *Waterloo*, play was fast and furious, though the attrition rate was not as intense, the result being that the feel was a lot more satisfying. However, the map was very basic, with no attempt being made to reproduce the ridge that stood Wellington in such good stead. As we shall see, moreover, there were also serious issues with the designer's interpretation of the chronology of the battle that do not make for a good reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> In the end, unless the expansion pack that was published for it is also obtained (this added a more detailed set of rules and increased the number of counters by making the brigade the basic unit rather

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<sup>3</sup> Readers who wish to experiment with the game may download all the necessary components, albeit in modernized form, at "Waterloo, 1962, the Avalon Hill Company," Gaming Stuff, JRCooper.com, accessed 3 September 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For some suggestions as to how the package can be improved, see Rob Gibson, "Improving the Basic *Napoleon at Waterloo*," *Phoenix*, no. 3 (October 1976). See also M. Booth, "Napoleon at Waterloo," *Phoenix*, no. 8 (July 1977); and Rob Gibson, "Napoleon at Waterloo Revisited," *Phoenix*, no. 11 (January 1978).

than the division), it is probably a better introduction to board war-games than it is to Waterloo, but, if only because it was the trailblazer for homages to the Hundred Days that concentrated on the events of 18 June alone rather than the entire campaign, it remains an influential piece whose ease of assimilation and limited counter mix renders it an ideal introduction to the subject. Simple to play though it is, however, it is far from easy to play well, if they are to have a hope of winning both sides, having no option but to employ techniques as sophisticated as anything required by higher levels of simulation. As one enthusiastic reviewer remarked, “This is the triumph of minimalism over excessive detail, the wargame stripped back to its fundamentals.”<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately for those gamers frustrated by the shortcomings of Waterloo and Napoleon at Waterloo, it was not long before relief was at hand. First on the scene in 1974 was a small company called Gamma Two Games that attempted to make its mark by bringing out a game titled simply Napoleon. Like Waterloo a recreation of the whole campaign of 1815, to considerable applause, this abandoned the usual hexagon grid and instead provided a map divided into geographical areas that was dominated by a simplified rendition of the road network of the theater of war and forced players, like real generals, to stick to highways of one sort or another rather than blithely having their unfortunate men plod forward across plowed fields and hack their way through patches of dense woodland.<sup>6</sup> Had other companies

<sup>5</sup> See Napoleon at Waterloo review “The Triumph of Minimalism over Excessive Detail,” Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 14 November 2020. A new edition of Napoleon at Waterloo characterized by far more attractive graphics is currently available from the game company Decision Games. However, those interested in experimenting with board wargaming may download all the components for self-assembly for free at “Napoleon at Waterloo Print and Play,” Games, Kobudo-Venlo.nl, accessed 28 August 2014. For reviews and discussion, see “Napoleon at Waterloo (1971),” accessed 28 August 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Given the relative simplicity of the package, it is ironic that one commentator who was most impressed with Napoleon was James F. Dunnigan (see below). “*Napoleon* [*sic*] is a fresh experience for the land-combat enthusiast. Although it does not resemble a simulation very much, it is a challenging game that can be fun to play: the difficulties provided by the movement system are far removed from those in more typical wargames [while] the vagaries of the dice produce scrambling tension-filled battles in which a decisive defeat can be turned into victory in a very short time. *Napoleon*, however, is not merely a die-rolling contest. The real emphasis is on concentrating sufficient force to overcome any freak occurrence: it is a refreshing break from the

followed the precedent set by the simplicity and elegance of Napoleon, the subsequent history of gaming the battle might have been very different. However, this was not to be. On the contrary, just a year later, another new venture calling itself Game Designers' Workshop (hereafter GDW) brought out a package called 1815: The Waterloo Campaign that put an end to any hope that the future would be anything other than hexagonal. Essentially an update on Waterloo, like its predecessor, this was a low-complexity simulation of the campaign of June 1815 as a whole that returned to the hexagon grid, but at the same time offered some additional detail—in particular, rules for command, control, and morale that prevented players from moving units hither and yon at their convenience—and also introduced a new element of risk (for example, French players were inhibited by a stipulation that laid down that all units in the vicinity ran the danger of fleeing in rout if the Old Guard was ever repulsed in an attack, and allied ones by another that, entirely correctly, effectively characterized the Prussian Army as a very fragile force whose ability to sustain combat losses and still function was anything but unlimited) and a greatly improved map, but was inclined to make for a much more historical game. Given that the starting positions are the same as those of the “real thing” and the objective of the French Army absolutely identical, battles will usually take place more or less where they actually did, while the more acute rendition of the terrain removed many of the advantages conveyed on the French, as we shall see, by Waterloo and Napoleon at Waterloo, the result being a distinct shift in the pattern of fortune. To quote Nicholas Palmer, “My impression—not based on firm evidence—is that the full game favours the Allies slightly, [though] overall both sides get a good run for their money.”<sup>7</sup>

If 1815: The Waterloo Campaign represented a step in the right direction in terms of some of the deficiencies that were all too visible in Waterloo and Napoleon at Waterloo, it was almost immediately to be outgunned. In 1976, SPI released Napoleon's Last Battles, this go-

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rigour and eye-strain of more conventional designs.” James F. Dunnigan, *Complete Wargames Handbook: How to Play, Design, and Find Them* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Palmer, *The Best of Board Wargaming* (London: Hippocrene Books, 1980), 100. See also “1815: The Waterloo Campaign,” BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 23 June 2020.

ing on to become one of the most popular wargames ever produced and, by far, the Waterloo game that has been played most frequently. Actually four separate battles—Quatre Bras, Ligny, Waterloo (known here as La Belle Alliance), and Wavre—that could be joined together and played as a single campaign, this was an impressive product whose maps were far more detailed than anything that had been seen thus far (in a particularly clever touch, the importance of reverse slopes so favored by Wellington was reproduced by the introduction of the innovation referred to as the *crest hexside*) and pushed the rules to a new level of detail, though not one so complicated as to slow down the flow of play. To quote Palmer once again, “Players like the system for its smooth operation, which imparts a reasonably Napoleonic flavour without great complexity.”<sup>8</sup> That said, over the years, there have been plenty of grumbles at the relatively bloodless combat results table (to be eliminated, units have to be deprived of any line of retreat, this being something that is in practice far from easy) and the fact that, rather than being marked by the cut and thrust, maneuver and countermove, that are the staple of most accounts of Napoleonic battles, games degenerate into largely static bare-knuckle grapples between long lines of units. Be all that as it may, however, as a simulation of the battle it worked (and still does work) extremely well. Confronted by an Anglo-Dutch Army only marginally weaker than themselves, Napoléon’s forces face a difficult task if they are to defeat Wellington before the Prussians arrive in overwhelming numbers on their right flank, and all the more so as employment of the Imperial Guard in an attack—the one real hope the French have of turning the balance—carries with it the risk of a general collapse in the army’s morale should things go wrong. Nor does it help that the

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<sup>8</sup> Palmer, *The Best of Board Wargaming*, 126. One problem that was not resolved was that of artillery. Although this could still fire at long range, as per Napoleon at Waterloo, it did so using precisely the same combat table as was used for close assaults, the net result being, in an exact reversal of reality, that the most vulnerable targets were small units operating alone and the most invulnerable heavy agglomerations of infantry or cavalry. To avoid this situation, a separate combat results table is needed, but, in the end, the matter is of little consequence as Napoleonic artillery could only rarely achieve drastic results operating on its own. Like several other Waterloo games, Napoleon’s Last Battles was the work of Kevin Zucker. Zucker, owner of games design company Operational Studies Group (OSG), has designed and published more than 30 games on Napoléon, including five games on Waterloo.

benefits conferred by holding Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte are particularly high—rather than the combat strength of the defenders being doubled as is the case with most other games, here they are rather trebled, the result being that the former, in particular, is literally impossible to take—or that the crest hexsides referred to above make it very hard for the French to smooth their way with the aid of long-range artillery bombardments. Barring egregious errors and extreme misfortune on the part of their opponent, the French commander can usually avoid an overwhelming defeat; but, as far as Napoléon was concerned, such a result would simply not have been good enough: as he well knew, his only hope was an overwhelming victory that would either break the Seventh Coalition or persuade it to make peace.<sup>9</sup>

Inherent in these comments is a reference to an issue that causes one of the greatest problems thrown up by attempts to refight Waterloo, namely what to do about the Prussians. Contrary to almost every published account of the battle, Napoléon had no knowledge whatsoever of Blücher's march from Wavre until Bülow's corps suddenly burst out of the woods beyond the extreme right wing of the French Army of the North at around 1630 and crashed into the flank of Mouton's troops (conversely, thanks to the configuration of the ground, there is no way the emperor could have spotted the Prussians before they attacked Mouton, while stories that French cavalry skirmished with the Prussians in the course of their march from Wavre and

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<sup>9</sup> The term *Seventh Coalition* refers to the military alliance of anti-French powers that formed in response to Napoléon's escape from Elba. The author has played the basic game many times and can testify to this from personal experience. However, the campaign game is a different matter: the only occasion that he attempted this produced a French defeat, but much was dependent here on a single unlucky dice throw involving an attack made by the Imperial Guard—a result preprogrammed by a rule laying down that any attack on the part of the guard that ends in the units concerned retreating after combat leads to the morale of the army as a whole taking a massive hit—and it is not clear that the result was representative. In 1995, a new edition of the game was produced by Decision Games that included Grand Ligny and Grand Waterloo scenarios that allowed gamers to recreate the events of 16 and 18 June simultaneously. As was the case with the same company's version of Napoleon at Waterloo, the graphics were much improved, especially in relation to the counters, but the enormous map that replaced the four smaller ones of the original quad is difficult to manage, especially if the game is played out on the obvious north-south axis. For reviews and discussions, compare to "Napoleon's Last Battles (1976)," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 28 August 2014.

brought a captured hussar to imperial headquarters are clearly fabrications). Indeed, while Napoléon knew that there were some Prussian troops (though certainly not Blücher's entire army) at Wavre, so far as he was concerned they were being contained by Grouchy. In any sort of reconstruction of the battle, however, things are very different. If there is a wargamer who does not know the basic outline of events, the author has yet to meet them, and it can therefore be assumed that players taking the side of the French will know perfectly well that Blücher is on his way, while a mere glance at the reinforcement schedules printed in the rulebooks will tell them exactly when and where to expect them. To be fair, some games try to get around the problem by varying the time that the Prussians will arrive and sometimes even randomizing it altogether, but that they will nevertheless show up at some point remains something that can be counted on or, at the very least, not discounted. From this, it follows that tabletop Napoléons are likely to engage in behavior that is ahistorical, to say the least, whether it is rejecting the attack on Wellington's left flank that was the course of action the emperor actually selected on 18 June 1815 for fear of being caught between two fires, or keeping Mouton in reserve to engage the Prussians when they arrive rather than sending him in to support Drouet in the manner envisaged on the day. In a very few games, one of them the *Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes* discussed below, there are rules blocking such behavior, in this particular instance by banning the French from moving any farther east than Papelotte until Blücher heaves into view, but such examples are few and far between; while they often throw up problems of their own, the fact here being that, sent to support a second attack on Wellington's left flank, Mouton's corps entered the very area from which the French are banned a good two hours before the Prussians arrived. As just discussed, in *Napoleon's Last Battles* and many other packages, such decisions make sense in game terms in that they will generally ensure that the Army of the North is still in business as dusk falls, and thereby secure it a draw, or even, depending how much damage is inflicted on Wellington and Blücher, a marginal victory, but, to reiterate, in terms of France's strategic situation in the Hundred Days, anything less than total victory was total defeat.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In 2016, Operational Studies Group issued what amounted to a substantial revision

To return to our review of 1815 wargames, the march to greater complexity did not, alas, stop here. Indeed, almost simultaneously with the release of Napoleon's Last Battles, the industry was hit by the arrival of the first of what proved to be a new generation of reconstructions in the form of Wellington's Victory: 18 June 1815—the Battle of Waterloo (SPI, 1976). In brief, driven by a quest for greater accuracy and improved detail—essentially, the mantra that had inspired Dunnigan to found SPI—designers turned to a new format that can be described as the “monster game,” other examples of the same genre including *La Bataille de Mont Saint Jean* (Clash of Arms Games, 1993), *The Battles of Waterloo* (GMT Games, 1994) and *Waterloo, 1815* (Dragon, 1996). However, the value of most of these products is to be doubted. On the one hand, they certainly build in a great deal of tactical realism in that units, which are represented down to battalion, squadron, and battery level, can, albeit in abstract form, adopt all the same formations as their real counterparts, just as different weapon and tactical systems are given the chance to function in a realistic fashion and commanders forced to think about such irritating but nonetheless ever-present problems as ammunition expenditure; but, on the other hand, they are so big and so complex that they simply cannot be played through in any meaningful way. To take just one example, Wellington's Victory has more than 2,000 counters, while so much recordkeeping is involved that the commanders need access to a veritable general staff.<sup>11</sup> As one reviewer observed of *The Battles of Waterloo*,

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of Napoleon's Last Battles in the form of *Napoleon's Last Gamble: Battles of the Hundred Days*. While adhering to the same philosophy, this added a considerable amount of extra detail, thereby considerably reducing playability, not least because the relatively modest counter mix of the original has been increased to more than 400. See *Napoleon's Last Gamble: Battles of the Hundred Days* review “‘Last Battle’ to ‘Last Gamble’—What's New?” *Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com*, accessed 23 June 2020.

<sup>11</sup> In a masterpiece of understatement, Nicholas Palmer describes Wellington's Victory as “an imposing game indeed.” Palmer, *The Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming* (London: Hippocrene Books, 1977), 184. To add insult to injury, the claim that the designers produced an accurate reflection of the tactics of the Napoleonic era has been challenged by many reviewers, the basis of their criticism being that skirmishers are given far more potential than their role on the battlefields of 1803–15 actually merited. See *Wellington's Victory: Battle of Waterloo Game—June 18th 1815* (1979) review “Unvarnished Review,” *Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com*, accessed 23 June 2020.



## Chapter 4

Before starting on *Battles of Waterloo*, be advised that this game is rule-intensive. There are over two hundred rules governing the Combat Segment alone, and that does not include all the various factors in die-roll modifiers such as column adjusters in shock and fire, universal-disorder die rolls, reduced movement factors, square defensive-reaction adjustments, retreat before fire defensive-reaction adjustments, leader casualty defensive-reaction factors, retreat-movement defensive-reaction adjustments, shock-commitment defensive-reaction adjustments, charge defensive-reaction modifiers, disorder adjustments, and rout check adjustments (to name a few).<sup>12</sup>

With a mere 450 counters, *The Battles of Waterloo* probably merits a place at the least forbidding end of the “monster” register, but that does not mean that it does not suffer from the same basic problem. In reality, commanders operating at the level of Wellington, Napoléon, or Blücher simply do not concern themselves with anything other than big operational decisions—the dispatch of this corps here or the withdrawal of that division there—and it is therefore little short of ridiculous to attempt to represent the whole gamut of Napoleonic warfare within the bounds of a single game in the manner of *Wellington’s Victory* and its fellows. The games systems involved in them might just be applicable to smaller actions, or perhaps to small parts of large actions—in the case of *Waterloo*, obvious examples would be the defense of Hougoumont or La Haye Sainte or, for that matter, the struggle for Plancenoit (something that was, as we shall see, actually attempted by a number of latter-day simulations)—and, albeit on a rather grander scale, SPI attempted to do just that with the release of *Ney vs. Wellington*, which used the rules from *Wellington’s Victory* to refight the battle of *Quatre Bras*, but in the end it is hard to see the point: if what is wanted is an analysis of what happened when a brigade in column attacked one in line, fine, but, if that is the case, then

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<sup>12</sup> See *The Battles of Waterloo* (1994) review “BOW is Rule-Intensive, But a Great Napoleonic-era Strategy and Tactics Game,” Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 23 June 2020.

one might as well use figures.<sup>13</sup>

In taking the line that he did, James Dunnigan, the man more responsible than anyone else for the emergence of the monster game, insisted that, unlike Avalon Hill, which had throughout the 1960s stuck to the winning formula encompassed by Gettysburg and its successors, he was simply trying to be “directly responsive to gamer desires.”<sup>14</sup> However, if there was certainly much to criticize with regard to the Avalon Hill games of the 1958–70 period, and if there were, too, plenty of customers who were looking for something more, so fanatical was Dunnigan and his disciples in their drive for a new-model game, that, at least in the view of the current author, they lost sight of reality. Thus, Richard Berg’s 1979 Campaign for North Africa has been rated by one reviewer as the most complex game ever devised, covering, as it does, “every aspect of the African campaign from individual planes and pilots to [water] evaporation and spillage.”<sup>15</sup> Requiring in this case, or so it is believed, approximately 1,500 hours of playing time for the full campaign game, such labors of love were so impossible to master that they alienated even those who had been most anxious to see an advance on the old Avalon Hill standard. In fairness, it does have to be said that, if what is wanted is a recreation

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<sup>13</sup> The author, as he goes on to admit elsewhere, is not usually a fan of playing games on the computer. However, even he is prepared to make an exception for the version of Wellington’s Victory that is currently available as a downloadable app for mobile phones from HexWar Games, this rendering the unplayable playable in sparkling fashion in a format that is much more compatible than the norm; there is much that is lost or, at least, abstracted, certainly, but the tactical detail that is the essence of the package has survived the transition to e-form unscathed.

<sup>14</sup> Dunnigan, *Complete Wargames Handbook*, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Freeman, *The Complete Book of Board Wargames*, 172. For a particularly acerbic analysis, we can turn to Nicholas Palmer: “The distinctive feature of the game is that it is complex to the point of insanity, not merely in the massive rule-book, but in the mind-blowing procedures for play. Preparation for one limited-unit scenario can take the better part of a weekend since every unit needs to have details of its composition noted by the players on a photo-copy of a standard organizational chart. Having noted down the details of every artillery piece in each brigade and distributed the petrol, ammunition, water, stores and . . . infantry among the available trucks with each unit, one proceeds to record the aircraft type of every plane in North Africa with pilot ratings for the fighters. You are now ready to play, and the units start to lumber off, checking constantly for mechanical breakdowns, fuel usage, availability of stores and water and so forth. All this is a considerable challenge without having to worry about the enemy . . . and the amount of work involved . . . puts an altogether different complexion on the word ‘monster.’” Palmer, *The Best of Board Wargaming*, 25–26.

of life at the headquarters of the Afrika Korps or the Eighth Army, Campaign in North Africa succeeds admirably; if those who try it discover nothing else, they will certainly get a taste of the huge administrative effort necessitated by the demands of large-scale warfare in the twentieth century, the only problem being that Erwin Rommel and his successive British counterparts enjoyed the services of large staffs who had been trained to handle the myriad details that confront the game's owners. Setting aside the impact of such games—which, incidentally, forced Avalon Hill to compete with equally disastrous monsters of its own—on the hobby, which in the period from 1980 onward went into a steep decline that was only in part the result of the growing popularity of computer alternatives, we here come to a fundamental point.<sup>16</sup> For full-scale battles, the fact of the matter is that on many different levels what is needed is abstraction, and that is precisely what is delivered by such games as Napoleon's Last Battles. Indeed, in 1979, the point was reinforced by the Operational Studies Group (OSG), a gaming company that had conceived the extremely ambitious idea of producing a series of games with a common rules system that would recreate all the major battles of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and, rather in the style of SPI's introductory Napoleon at Waterloo, marketed an introductory pilot entitled Hundred Days' Battles: Waterloo 1815. Based on the whole four-day campaign rather than the final clash at Mont Saint-Jean, this is an extremely elegant affair that is played out in just four game turns and recreates the rival armies at the divisional level, thereby rendering it one of the more manageable products in the field, in which respect matters are further improved by the fact that the only counters that are actually placed on the map are the corps and army commanders. As for the game, meanwhile, what one has is a desperate race for time with Napoléon storming across the frontier and trying to smash Blücher before Wellington can get his scattered Anglo-Dutch forces into action, and his two opponents trying equally frantically to concentrate their men in the Quatre Bras-Ligny area before they are overtaken by disaster. So far, so simple, but the

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<sup>16</sup> A case in point is the 1977 reissue of the original Gettysburg game. According to Freeman, this was "one of the most splendid examples of wretched excess ever published," being characterized by "rules that were excessively complex and overwrought." Freeman, *The Complete Book of Board Wargames*, 145.

situation is not just a matter of crude counter-pushing; on the contrary, thanks to some very tough command rules, neither side have full control of their armies, so much so, indeed, that they are dependent on some very lucky dice throwing to get their full strength on the move in any given turn. For various reasons that need not be gone into here, this is much less of a problem for the allies than it is for the French, and the author's experience is that, as in 1815, the latter in practice have only a limited chance of securing victory.<sup>17</sup>

With the point proved in so neat a fashion, it is a relief to report that in the last 20 years there has been a move away from the monster game in the direction of more modest offerings, an early contender here being *Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle*.<sup>18</sup> Brought out by Phalanx Games in 2001, in an odd reversion to the early days of the hobby, this opted for the use of squares rather than hexagons and eschewed the use of fixed movement and combat factors in favor of a system whereby movement and combat points were assigned to the various units from a species of central store and attacks settled, not by an Avalon Hill-style combat results chart, but rather simple numerical comparison, the result being a much faster game that still manages to deliver results that are reasonably satisfying in historical terms.<sup>19</sup> Also interesting, particularly from the point of view of those who like the possibility of incorporating figures into board games, is *Vive l'Empereur!* (Giogames, 2003). A development of a highly suc-

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<sup>17</sup> Curiously, *Battles of the Hundred Days* did not figure in the series of games for which it was a pilot, its place in the OSG stable being taken by another whose 1815 slot was filled by *Napoleon's Last Gamble: Battles of the Hundred Days*, a package that, apart from the absence of the campaign variant, is essentially very similar in terms of design and complexity to *Napoleon's Last Battles*. See "Napoleon's Last Gamble: Battles of the Hundred Days (2016)," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 1 June 2015. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the monster games never quite swept the board, the latter half of the 1970s seeing both SPI and GDW bring out series—the former's so-called quads and the latter's Series 120—that offered a more modest approach, while many of the offerings that came with such magazines as *Strategy and Tactics* were perfectly accessible. In practice, it is probably these packages that were actually played by most gamers, but it was, alas, the monsters that set the tone, and a very damaging tone it was too. For a brief discussion, see Palmer, *The Best of Board Wargaming*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> According to the publication details, the designer was Berg's son, Alexander, but this was in the nature of a tribute to the young man concerned, who passed away at an early age at some point in the course of the game's development.

<sup>19</sup> For some informed discussion, compare to "Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle (2002)," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 28 August 2014.

successful game called Battle Cry based on the American Civil War that was developed by the leading American designer, Richard Borg, in the late 1990s, this is not in and of itself a Waterloo game but rather a simple tactical simulation that is designed in such a way as to allow the purchaser to fight a wide range of battles (both real and imaginary).<sup>20</sup> However, the starter scenario that is provided is Waterloo—one side of the double-sided game board is, in fact, a printed map of the battlefield—and the fact is that, for practical reasons alone, it is always likely to be seen as a Waterloo piece. As such, meanwhile, it is, perhaps, the most exciting game on the market; thanks to simple and well-explained rule systems, action surges up and down the usual hexagonal grid at great speed while generally producing results that are entirely plausible. Wellington’s Victory it most certainly is not, but, in this case, a lot less is a lot more. As one reviewer noted,

*Vive l’Empereur* is very successful in achieving a difficult goal: Napoleonic battles have never been so simple to play. The rules are clear and short, so that even unexperienced players can approach the game without being frustrated by the usual complexity of this genre. . . . Napoleonic wargames are usually something very difficult and almost exclusively dedicated to fans, [but] now everyone gets his chance.<sup>21</sup>

If the two games just mentioned are directed at the entertainment end of the market and at the same time represent a move away from the foundational principles established by Avalon Hill, recent years have seen a return to traditional Roberts-style mechanisms together with a resurrection of the mixture of playability and realism offered by Napoleon’s Last Battles. Of the games involved, we can here cite

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<sup>20</sup> Note: Richard Borg is not to be confused with the similarly named Richard Berg.

<sup>21</sup> *Vive l’Empereur* review “User Review,” Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 1 July 2020. It should be noted that the manufacturers of *Vive l’Empereur* were heavily criticized for lifting the package’s mechanics directly from *Commands and Colors: Napoleonic*, a very similar product created by Richard Borg that covered some 13 battles between the British and the French, of which Waterloo was the last. To judge from both players’ reports and an inspection of the contents, it has to be said that the accusation is difficult to refute. For a battle report, see “History to #Wargame—The Battle of Waterloo 2021 Edition with *Commands and Colors Napoleonic* (@gmtgames, 2019),” *Rocky Mountain Navy Gamer* (blog), accessed 5 March 2022.

five examples, namely Victory Point Games' Waterloo 20 (the somewhat strange name derives from the fact that, like all the many stalemates in the same series, it aims to recreate its subject with no more than 20 playing pieces); *C3I* magazine's Waterloo Campaign, 1815; Pendragon Games Studio's oddly titled Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes; River Horse's Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!; and Turning Point Simulations' The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD. Of these, the first two simulate the campaign as a whole and the other three the action of 18 June alone, but all five share an emphasis on playability in the form of limited counter mixes, a relatively restricted number of game terms and—for the most part, Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes is a serious offender in this respect—rules that are simple and well presented (Waterloo Campaign, 1815, indeed, is buttressed by one of the best-designed rule books the author has ever seen, while at the same time being graced by perhaps the most aesthetically pleasing map of the theater of operations that has ever hit the market). As for how the games concerned play, the two campaign offerings can be got through in no more than three hours apiece and operate at corps level, while lacking the overt moves in the direction of favoring the French in the style of some of the examples discussed below.<sup>22</sup> Just as successful, meanwhile, are the three “battle” games. Thus, Day of Waterloo is very much a return to the Waterloo component of Napoleon's Last Battles with the addition of various amendments to the rules that bring in issues of command and morale and provide a separate table for artillery fire (thereby avoiding the curious anomaly found in many basic games we have already noted that handles long-range bombardment via the same combat results table as all other attacks), not to mention an interesting preamble that covers the period from dawn to the beginning of the battle around six hours later and does a very good job in showing why Napoléon could not launch his attack any earlier than he did. As was the case in June 1815, the French begin the day with many of their formations scattered over the sodden countryside between Rossomme and Genappes and even skillful players will have some trouble getting them in line in time to begin the battle at the hour it actually began. As well as being very attractively produced,

<sup>22</sup> For details of Waterloo 20 and The Day of Waterloo, 1815 AD, see “Waterloo 20 (2000),” BoardGameGeek.com; and “The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD (2019),” BoardGameGeek.com, both accessed 1 July 2020.

the resultant package is certainly intriguing, but the verdict on the question as to whether the increased complexity damages the flow of the game to an extent more than it is worth must be regarded as being very much open. By contrast, there are no such worries with the beautifully elegant *Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!* Exceptionally well designed, not least because it avoids the problem to be found in many other games of too many counters being crammed into far too small a space, this consistently delivers the correct historical result: at best, with a little luck, Napoléon can secure victory over Wellington before the Prussians arrive in such strength as to finish him off, but only at such cost as to render his victory utterly meaningless.<sup>23</sup> Finally, still more interesting is *Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes*, as this does away with the hexagon grid in favor of a *kriegsspiel*-style map over which units maneuver with the aid of rulers and engage in combat much in the style that miniatures do and also distinguishes itself by being one of the very few games that, first, offers a map that, despite some oddities (Hougoumont, for example, is shown as being on high ground rather than buried in the hollow that is the reality, while also being deprived of the wood and orchards that so greatly affected its role in the battle) makes a genuine attempt to represent the full complexity of the battlefield and, especially, the substantial ridge that links the positions of Wellington and Napoléon, and, second, effectively removes Marshal Ney from the French chain of command (according to the traditional story, Ney played a major role—even *the* major role—in the conduct of the battle, whereas the reality was that he was deprived of the command functions he had been invested with in the first part of the campaign and reduced to galloping aimlessly around the battlefield as a cross between a cheerleader and a mascot). As for the sort of battle that it generates, the French are under a lot of pressure to achieve results as they only have seven moves, each of them representing 30 minutes of real time, to deal with the Anglo-Dutch before the Prussians start to swarm on to the battlefield at the rather early time of 1500 in the afternoon, and yet they are encumbered by command rules that make it very difficult for them to get their full strength on the move at any given time, the consequence being, at

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<sup>23</sup> For details of *Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!*, see “*Waterloo: Quelle Affaire* (2015),” Board-GameGeek.com, accessed 1 July 2020.

least in the experience of the author, that there is no way that they can achieve the sort of results that would be necessary to secure even a marginal victory.<sup>24</sup>

Mention of the Prussians, meanwhile, cannot but bring us to one of the very few games that seeks to give detailed coverage to other aspects of the battle than the attack and defense of Mont Saint-Jean, namely White Dog Games' *Crisis on the Right: Plancenoit, 1815* (2014). Straightforward and unpretentious, this is a brigade-level rendition of Bülow's battle with Mouton on the heights of Agiers and, subsequently, the desperate struggle for the blazing ruins of the key village featured in the title. Whether the French can beat off their assailants the author has yet to discover, but what is certain is that the package does give an excellent account of itself in reproducing a "battle within the battle" that, though comparatively little-known, was far more important than the long-running struggle for Hougomont that had raged for the first few hours of the conflict on the other side of the battlefield.<sup>25</sup>

Despite this move in the direction of simple rules and smaller numbers of counters, the more grandiose aspirations of game designers were far from dead. A good example can be seen in *Waterloo, 1815: Fallen Eagles* (Hexasim, 2015). This offering, proclaimed one review, was a great advance on days gone by.

For those hardy Napoleonic veterans who are used to systems like *Wellington's Victory* and *La Bataille de Mont Saint Jean* or . . . *Battles of Waterloo* . . . *Fallen Eagles* presents as a very manageable package indeed. Though the . . . box boasts of two maps, four countersheets, sixteen playing cards, player-aid cards . . . a full-colour rule-book, a full-colour playbook and two dice, this is not a monster game in either scale or scope. There is less to *Fallen Eagles* than meets the eye, and thank goodness for that, for this is an arena where less is more.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For a review, see Paul Comben, "Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes—A Boardgaming Way Review by Paul Comben," *Boardgaming Way*, 6 November 2015.

<sup>25</sup> For a review, see Matt White, "Review of Crisis on the Right: Plancenoit 1815 War-game from White Dog Games," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 17 March 2022.

<sup>26</sup> See Waterloo 1815: Fallen Eagles review "The Endless What If? A Review of Hexasim's Waterloo 1815: Fallen Eagles," Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com, accessed



There is some truth in this analysis. Four hundred counters is better than 2,000, while there is no attempt to replicate the tactical dimension addressed in Wellington's Victory and its fellows. Also helpful is the inclusion of several scenarios designed to reproduce particular episodes of the battle. That said, however, *Fallen Eagles* is still a project that is not to be embarked on too lightly. To quote (astonishingly enough), the same reviewer:

It takes two players about forty minutes to set up, then each turn, with an average of . . . moves for upwards of 100 units per side, takes a minimum of seventy-five minutes . . . [to] complete—probably more—and that is not counting combat, card-play, rout, rally and order changes. For initial games played to completion, you won't get much change out of twenty hours, and given the gaps between my plays, every game has felt like a first game. I cannot see completing it in under twelve hours, no matter how experienced I become. Too long to play often, probably too long to master, certainly too long to play sufficiently often to put the alternative-history cards to a practical test.<sup>27</sup>

Rather similar in terms of its level of complexity, meanwhile, is another game produced at the same time, namely Trafalgar Editions' *Waterloo, 1815: Napoleon's Last Battle*. Like *Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes*, this game eschews the use of hexagons in favor of a conventional map, which in turn means that the game plays out, not so much as a traditional board wargame, but rather as a miniatures game involving the use of the 2-mm-scale regimental blocks marketed by a number of manufacturers (indeed, rather than cardboard counters, the package makes use of wooden blocks of approximately the same dimension). Currently, it has yet to be play-tested by the author, but, while it has to be acknowledged that it enjoys a measure of both re-

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<sup>24</sup> June 2020.

<sup>27</sup> *Waterloo 1815: Fallen Eagles* review "The Endless What If?" Either drawn at random by the players or specifically picked by them, the alternative history cards referred to here discount inconvenient historical facts such as the downpour the night before the battle or the cumulative delays that kept the Prussians out of the fight until the late afternoon, thereby allowing the two commanders to test out alternative hypotheses.

spect and popularity among the gaming community, the sheer number of units that are represented, not to mention the tiny size of the playing pieces and the fact the general clutter that characterizes the game board is constantly being augmented by a wide range of different markers denoting such things as the losses of individual units and the formations they are in at any given time, suggests that the package is not the most practical basis on which to proceed. Given the fact that the game designers have also conflated column of attack (a formation some 50-files wide in the case of an infantry battalion of 600 men) with the 6–10-files wide column of march, it is difficult to be enthusiastic even about its claims to offer an accurate portrayal of the battle tactics of the Napoleonic age. If it is worth purchasing at all, then, it would really only be for the map, a genuinely beautiful artifact that could easily be pressed into service for alternative approaches to the battle, though it should be noted that, like so many of its counterparts, it does not capture the contours of the field with complete accuracy.<sup>28</sup>

Thus far, all the many games that we have reviewed have worked on the grand tactical level in that, even if they represent individual units down to the level of the battalion, squadron, or even company, they seek to replicate the actions of brigades, divisions, and corps in the presence of the enemy on battlefields that measure three or four miles across. So far as is known, setting aside the partial scenarios contained in *Fallen Eagles* that have already been mentioned, there are only five games that operate at the humbler level of said subunits, these being *Hougoumont: Rock of Waterloo*, a well-received magazine game that concentrated on the defense of the chateau and its immediate environs, and, like the historical prototype, by all accounts is very difficult for the French to win; *Decision Games' Hougoumont: Key to Waterloo, 18 June 1815* (2021); “*La Garde recule!*,” a simple but nonetheless interesting simulation of the last-ditch attack of the guard played on a postcard-size map in which, as in *Battles of the Hundred Days*, the chances of a French victory rely very heavily (and historically) on luck; and, last but not least, *A Hard Pounding Fight: the Battle for La Haye Sainte* (2019), both of the last two be-

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<sup>28</sup> For some reviews, see “*Waterloo 1815: Napoleon’s Last Battle* (2016),” *BoardGameGeek.com*, accessed 17 March 2022.

ing marketed by Turning Point Simulations.<sup>29</sup> Moving the focus up from the operational to the strategic, the gamer who wants to widen their activities to include, not just the Belgian theater but also the whole of France has equally few options, the only one familiar to the author being the 1815 scenario of Avalon Hill's *War and Peace* (1980). Reasonably straightforward if rather cumbersome in its mechanics, *War and Peace* is designed to allow its players to fight their way through each and every one of Napoléon's campaigns (in theory, it is also possible to set up a game simulating the whole gamut of the Napoleonic Wars, but this could last up to 120 turns, each of which can take an hour or more to play). What, though, of the manner in which this simulates the events of 1815? In brief, the answer here is "very well indeed." A rapid invasion of Belgium in the first move has some chance of driving back (though not destroying) Wellington and Blücher, but very soon large numbers of Austrian troops are pouring across the Rhine, while these last are soon joined by even greater numbers of Russians. It is, of course, possible for the French player to forego the possibility of an early victory in Belgium and instead concentrate most of the forces available in the Champagne area with a view to employing interior lines against successive allied armies as they file across the frontier (a plan that Napoléon actually toyed with), but the end result is little different: sooner or later, despite the somewhat dubious inclusion in the French armory of the possibility of partisan warfare (a phenomenon that in fact was notable by its absence in both 1814 and 1815), Napoléon finds himself bottled up in Paris (which the French have to maintain in their hands on pain of instant defeat) without hope of relief, the moral very much being

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<sup>29</sup> While admirers of Wellington may find it hard to stomach, the attack of the guard might have led to a major disaster had the Dutch commander, David Hendrik, baron Chassé, not launched his reserve division in a desperate counterattack that remedied the panic engendered by the impact of the first wave of the troops concerned, a further issue being that the already numerically weak attacking forces hit the allied line in three successive waves: just as Chassé might have shown less in the way of initiative so Napoléon might have intervened more closely in the staging of the attack rather than letting it drift apart in the manner that actually took place. For details of the three games concerned, see Hougoumont review, Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "If You Think 'The Guards Counterattack' Only Meant Stalingrad, Think Again . . .," Games, Grogard.com, accessed 1 June 2020; "Crisis on the Right: Plancenot 1815 (2014)," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 1 July 2020; and "'La Garde recule!' (2011)," BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 1 June 2020.

that the whole escapade never had the slightest chance of success—that Waterloo, indeed, was of far less significance than has generally been supposed.<sup>30</sup>

We have here, then, several 1815 games where the odds are stacked very heavily against the French, while the same is also true of the La Belle Alliance scenario of Wellington's Last Battles. As far as many wargamers are concerned, however, such situations are inherently problematic: the whole point of playing games, after all, is that either side should be able to win. However, it is not just this. Thus, for a wide variety of reasons, the wargaming world has a strong bent in the direction of Napoléon, the emperor being, after all, as charismatic a figure today as he was 200 years ago, not to mention one generally accepted as one of the greatest military geniuses of all time, and, particularly in 1814–15, a classic underdog whose situation was tailor-made to attract much sympathy.<sup>31</sup> Add to that the same romantic appeal of a lost cause that makes so many wargamers warm to the cause of the Confederacy in the American Civil War or that of Charles I in its English counterpart, not to mention that fact that the board wargame is very much an American product and therefore one of a society that has a strong tendency to romanticize the emperor, and it will easily be understood that there is a real desire to see history changed, to see Waterloo transformed into a French victory. In any case, is not part of the appeal of wargaming a desire to explore alternative outcomes and possibilities, even, indeed, to change history? Indeed, the very fact that Avalon Hill and other manufacturers have preferred to develop games that model the entire campaign rather than just the day of Waterloo is redolent of this desire, the fact being that, if the situation on 18 June is modeled in an accurate fash-

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<sup>30</sup> So far as the author is concerned, this assessment is admittedly the fruit of only one testing of the scenario. However, the notes provided in the rules are disarmingly honest: "This is an exceedingly difficult scenario for the French player to win."

<sup>31</sup> Such is the appeal of Napoléon that the designers of Waterloo 20 seemingly felt obliged to include a note of apology in respect of the fact that the commander with the highest ratings in the game was not the emperor. Meanwhile, it is instructive both to contrast the number of games whose title either features Napoléon or is in some way gallicized compared to those where it is rather Wellington who comes to the fore and to reflect on a tradition of box art that prioritizes images either of the emperor or of French soldiers, especially members of the Old Guard, engaging in acts of heroism.

ion, it is very hard for the imperial cause to triumph. To quote one anonymous games designer:

Frankly, I have never liked any games on [the battle of] Waterloo. . . . In many ways, they seem pointless. All the important decisions have already been made in the campaign. By the time the battle starts, in many ways it is already won or lost. There is really nothing left to do but throw troops at each other and see who gets more lucky.<sup>32</sup>

The net result of all this is that in many cases history is tampered with so as to give the French a chance of victory. This occurs even at the simplest level, Palitoy's 1975 Battle of Waterloo—essentially, a children's game that nonetheless succeeds in producing a representation of the struggle of 18 June that is surprisingly subtle—giving the allied player far fewer choices in respect of doing damage to the other side than the French one.<sup>33</sup> Hardly surprisingly, this produces a contest that is heavily weighted toward Napoléon, this being a tendency that is mirrored in many of the game's more sophisticated counterparts. Let us take, for example, Napoleon at Waterloo. Beginning with the board, as we have seen, this is bare of any attempt to represent Mont Saint-Jean, thereby depriving Wellington of the reverse slopes that were so central to the British commander's success. However, this is not the only advantage handed to the French. On the contrary, in the initial deployment laid down by the rules, Hougoumont is left all but unprotected, the result being that Napoléon's forces can invariably seize it at the very outset of the battle, thereby opening the way for the drive on Wellington's right flank that is often assumed to be the emperor's best chance of victory (something that the game design reinforces by making one of the ways in which the French can win the battle the exiting from the map of a set number of units via a line of hexagons conveniently placed at the top left-hand

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<sup>32</sup> See "Waterloo," [CommandPostGames.com](http://CommandPostGames.com), accessed 4 June 2020.

<sup>33</sup> For a brief description of The Battle of Waterloo, see chap. 1, footnote 14. The logic of this arrangement, one presumes, was to reflect the supposed superiority of Napoléon over Wellington as a military commander, the former being painted in works sympathetic to the emperor as being as imaginative and daring as the latter was plodding and cautious.

corner of the map: no need, then, to engage in a messy struggle for La Haye Sainte). As if this was not enough, meanwhile, the French forces available at the start of the day include the corps of General Mouton, when in reality this last did not reach its designated position on the field until the middle of the afternoon.<sup>34</sup> In fairness, the factors favoring the French are balanced by others favoring the allies, namely the much later starting time than was the case in reality, the much weaker striking power of most French units in comparison to their allied counterparts, and the absurdly early time—1500—chosen for the arrival of the Prussians. In the experience of the author, all this makes it hard for Napoléon to win in that the French simply do not have either the time or the military might to batter Wellington’s army into incoherence before Blücher and his forces get to grips, the only hope for those who admire the emperor therefore being to employ the variant that allows Grouchy to march his crucial 35,000 men to the battlefield, but among many gamers there remains a perception that it is the French who have the better chance of winning.<sup>35</sup>

If the issue of bias is open to debate in respect of Napoleon at Waterloo—one reviewer, indeed, goes so far as to deny it altogether, writing of his record of playing the game solo, “Three wins, three losses and a draw as the French; three wins, three losses and one draw as the Allies. You can’t ask for fairer than that.”—the situation that we find in Phalanx Games’ Waterloo is much more unequivocal.<sup>36</sup> Here

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<sup>34</sup> As first produced, the game left Hougoumont without any garrison whatsoever. See Donald Brent, “Napoleon at Waterloo: A Survey of SPI’s Classic Introductory War-game,” Videos, Napoleon at Waterloo (1971), BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 14 November 2011.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of these issues, see Redmond A. Simonsen, “Napoleon at Waterloo: The Bias Nobody Knows . . .,” *Moves: Combat Simulation, Theory and Technique*, no. 3 (June 1972): 27–28. According to Simonsen, the problem lies with the tendency of many gamers to handle Wellington’s forces in a purely defensive fashion when they would in fact do much better to attack hard and fast from the outset, an approach leading, in his view, to an odds ratio of 60:40 in favor of the allies. Yet, this advice runs contrary to the principle of simulation in that Wellington had no intention of moving a single man until the Prussians had arrived to reinforce his forces. Much the same is true of the “Grouchy option”: as modern research has shown that it would have been impossible for that unfortunate commander to reach the battlefield on time, it follows that to introduce him on the battlefield would be to abandon simulation in favor of fantasy.

<sup>36</sup> See Napoleon at Waterloo review “Surprisingly Delightful,” Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 14 November 2020.

we find that, while Wellington has remembered to put a strong garrison in Hougoumont, he has unaccountably neglected to do the same with regard to La Haye Sainte, thereby enabling the French to gain an instant foothold in the Anglo-Dutch center that Wellington necessarily cannot but find it very hard to deal with. Needless to say, this design fault can be ironed out by changing the initial disposition of the Anglo-Dutch forces or prohibiting the French from occupying La Haye Sainte in the first move, but the result of such changes is definitely to tip the balance of the battle against Napoléon, thereby suggesting, of course, that Wellington's position was such that it was almost impossible for the emperor to defeat his forces before the Prussians arrived. Much the same is true, meanwhile, of "La Garde recule!". Confined, as we have seen, to a recreation of the attack of the guard on Wellington's center in the closing moments of the battle, this sees just six French battalions charging up the slopes of Mont Saint-Jean against a defending force composed of six battalions of British infantry, two battalions of Dutch infantry, and a Dutch artillery battery. The French, then, are not just fighting uphill but also significantly outnumbered, and it might therefore be thought that they would have little or no chance. Not so, however, the designer stipulating that half the British infantry, including two key battalions of guards—those of "Now, Maitland: now's your time!" fame—should be deployed in a second line as a reserve, leaving the place in the front line that they had occupied in reality to be held by the Dutch units, all of them much weaker. As a result, the French have an excellent chance of, at the very least, breaking into the Anglo-Dutch position and, albeit much more tentatively, some hope of winning the game altogether. Yet, even with the assistance provided by shuffling the defenders in the manner in which we have just seen, "La Garde recule!" is not an easy run for Napoléon. In the words of one reviewer, "This pocket battle game is finely balanced. Out of twenty or so games played, the Allies won sixty per cent. . . . Now, some may say, 'That is not balance,' but . . . did the French really have a chance with [so] few battalions of the Guard attacking?"<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See "La Garde recule!," *Angry Bunny's Wargame Blog*, accessed 2 July 2020. In fairness, the same company's *A Hard Pounding Fight: The Battle for La Haye Sainte* appears to be unmarred by even a minimal pretension to aid and abet the imperial cause. To quote another reviewer, "This game is fun. It is not a walkover for the French and

## *How Many Hexes to Hougomont?*

If one tendency is to weaken Wellington's position by minimizing its physical strength, inventing mistakes that the British commander never made or tampering with the disposition of his forces, another is to do precisely the opposite with regard to Napoléon. If we look at the Avalon Hill game that lies at the heart of this discussion, then, we find that the battlefield is depicted in such a way as to give the French a significant advantage—as with Napoleon at Waterloo, Mont Saint-Jean is brazenly bulldozed into the playing surface—but the more usual ploy is to remedy the errors committed by Napoléon in the wake of the Battle of Ligny.<sup>38</sup> The aftermath of this action can with some justice be seen as the death knell of any chance the emperor had of securing even such limited gains as the occupation of Belgium offered him (in this respect, it is the author's firm contention that beating Wellington and Blücher would have had no effect other than to redouble the efforts of all concerned to get rid of the French ruler), for, having been charged with pursuing the retreating Prussians, the unfortunate Grouchy was sent off in the wrong direction and in consequence ended up in such a position that he could not have arrived in time to save his master even if he had tried to do so. Nor was this an end to the matter. Without going into the details, for a variety of reasons, Grouchy ended up with too few cavalry—the very arm of service he most needed—and too many infantry, the result being, of course, that Napoléon was left with a superfluity of mounted units but a reduced force of foot-sloggers. Here again, then, is an opportunity to give the French some hope of winning: in Napoleon at Waterloo, there is a chance that Grouchy's men will start to appear on the field as early as 1600 (and, still worse for the allies, to revert

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can go either way. . . . The French have a tough job to clear out all four [target] hexes, the three of La Haye Sainte and [the one of] the sand-pit by the end of Turn 5." See "A Hard Pounding Fight: The Battle for La Haye Sainte," *Angry Bunny's Wargame Blog*, accessed 2 July 2020.

<sup>38</sup> A further device made use of by the game designers to Napoléon was a stipulation that every point of French combat strength that succeeded in exiting from the northern edge of the map had to be matched by the loss of two strength points from the allied order of battle. In some ways, this is perfectly fair—had the Army of the North really done well enough to push on from Mont Saint-Jean toward Brussels, then it may be assumed that large numbers of Wellington's troops would have deserted—but it has to be said that without the damage done to the Anglo-Dutch and the Prussians in this fashion, one of the chief French victory conditions is beyond their grasp and, further, that the mechanism rests on nothing more than assumption.



to the theme of fictitious allied mistakes, another that the Prussians will not arrive at all), while in *Day of Waterloo* a variant on the basic game allows players to reverse the decisions taken after Ligny so as to give Napoléon fewer cavalry but more infantry in the crucial battle of 18 June. Curiously enough, though, what is very rarely modeled is the possibility that the corps that Wellington stationed some miles to the west at Halle to guard his right flank is either sent for by Wellington or marches to the sound of the guns on its own initiative, one of the very few exceptions known to the author being *Battles of the Hundred Days*.<sup>39</sup>

It is not just the question of Wellington's position. Another issue that designers tend to manipulate is the question of when the Prussians appear on the map. Americans having a certain desire to play down Wellington's achievements, they want to talk up the role of Blücher, one element of this being a tendency to set the conditions that define victory in such a fashion as to make it virtually impossible for the Anglo-Dutch-German forces to defeat Napoléon on their own. Evident, too, is an echo of the controversy that, according to Peter Hofschroer, at least, was generated by Siborne's reconstruction of the closing moments of the battle, there being a strong desire to see the Prussians arrive on the battlefield sooner rather than later. In *Napoleon at Waterloo* and *Napoleon's Last Battles*, then, they appear on the map as early as 1500, while *Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle* and *Day of Waterloo* have their first units doing so two hours earlier still. In fairness, this does not mean that Napoléon is immediately assailed by a vengeful Blücher; the Prussians do not arrive all at once, while, even when they do, it usually takes some time to get them into action (depending on the size of the map, their first appearance can be at a spot halfway to Wavre).<sup>40</sup> Yet, there are versions of the battle in which they are in action from a very early moment—*Day of Water-*

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<sup>39</sup> In fairness, it should be pointed out that the rules for *Napoleon at Waterloo* give the French only a 50 percent chance of Grouchy appearing, while at the same time allowing for the Prussians to turn up earlier and/or in greater strength than was actually the case.

<sup>40</sup> An alternative ploy in the case of the Prussians is to set their arrival at a time so late that the French have ample opportunity to defeat Wellington before they appear on the scene, one game that is particularly guilty of this being Gio-Games' *Vive l'Empereur!* See *Vive l'Empereur* review "User Review," *Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com*, accessed 1 July 2020.

loo is easily the worst at fault here—while bringing them on too soon cannot but be disastrous in simulation terms, for no sooner do Blücher’s forces emerge from the Bois de Paris than many players taking the role of Napoléon immediately switch to the defensive in the hope of saving at least something from the debacle that now threatens. In consequence, if emphasizing the role of the Prussians can, consciously or otherwise, counteract efforts to give the French a better chance of winning and remind the more Anglocentric members of the gaming fraternity that Waterloo truly was a matter of a *belle alliance*, the effect is more often than not completely ahistorical. To make the key point yet again, for Napoléon to have had any hope of saving his reign in 1815, he had to secure a decisive victory at Mont Saint-Jean, anything that either discourages an attempt to secure such a result or rewards another course of action massively reducing the value of re-fighting the battle as a simulation. Of this, careful game designers are well aware. To quote the men behind Napoleon’s Last Battles in respect of the full campaign variant, for example, “The victory conditions are very demanding on the French player: he must achieve [the] decisive victory [that was] exactly what Napoleon needed to accomplish to remain on the French throne.”<sup>41</sup>

Another way of giving the French a chance, of course, is to broaden out the area covered by the campaign so as to give players representing Napoléon the chance to try out alternative strategies available to the French ruler in 1815 such as a march on Belgium via the main Paris-Brussels highway rather than the more circuitous route that was adopted via Charleroi, or an attack on Blücher’s communications via the valley of the River Moselle. In reality, it is probable that either move would have availed the French very little, while it is difficult to see why they should really do so even in the context of a game, a further problem being that to provide the players a map covering the whole of France’s frontier from the English Channel to the Rhine is tantamount to switching from historical simulation to fantasy. However, such thinking has not prevented games designers from doing either precisely that or, at the very least, offering a wider stretch of Belgium, as witness such packages as the magazine game Waterloo Campaign of 1815, OSG’s Last Days of the Grande Armée,

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<sup>41</sup> Napoleon’s Last Battles rulebook, 15.

Clash of Arms' The Emperor Returns, and Gamma Two Games' Napoleon, or critics from taking to task more historically true-to-life efforts as "tunnel games" such as Napoleon's Last Battles (or, more specifically its campaign variant), Waterloo 20, and Battles of the Hundred Days, on the grounds that, in the event of the French being able to push farther north than Quatre Bras, they will inevitably end in a sloggish match in the Waterloo-Wavre area that, everything else being equal, is very unlikely to let them win the day.<sup>42</sup>

At stake here is a fundamental question. In brief, is the object to produce a game that offers both players a sporting chance of victory and, at the same time, the ability to rewrite history in a manner more suited to their tastes, or is it rather to produce a simulation that, by such devices as the design of the map, rather forces them to act out the same maneuvers as Napoléon and Wellington, thereby ending up with the French and Anglo-Dutch facing off to one another at Mont Saint-Jean while the Prussians push westward from Wavre to take the Army of the North in flank? Both can be satisfactory exercises—a French commander who can triumph in the terrible circumstances in which Napoléon found himself on the morning of 18 June 1815 can feel pleased with himself indeed, just as an allied one who prevents the French from winning the campaign when they have the advantage of a wide range of different strategies deserves to be wreathed in smiles—even useful exercises, and yet they are not one and the same and should not be considered as such, the difference being encapsulated by the contrast between Avalon Hill's Waterloo and the full campaign variant of SPI's Napoleon's Last Battles. Thus, in the former, players are free to do whatever they wish, the net result being that, few wargamers being likely deliberately to deprive themselves of the use of a large part of their forces by virtue of some self-denying ordnance, the many French troops absent from the Battle of Ligny, including most importantly, Drouet's I Corps, will be hurled against Blücher's position and thereby almost inevitably grant Napoléon the massive victory that he was seeking there. Also absent, meanwhile, is the sluggardly nature of Napoléon's handling of the campaign: armed with copious foresight, far from wasting time in the manner of the

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<sup>42</sup> For a good example of the yearning to give Napoléon more options, see Paul Comben, "Several Ways with the Hundred Days," *Boardgaming Life*, 31 August 2014.

campaign of 1815, the emperor's tabletop equivalent will invariably make the best speed possible with the Army of the North and strive to maintain incessant pressure on Wellington and Blücher. What do we see in Napoleon's Last Battles, by contrast? In the first place, a rule designed to ensure that the troops who never got into action on 16 June are most unlikely to intervene in the fighting of that day, and, in the second, another that makes it very likely that significant portions of Napoléon's forces will be seriously delayed in getting on the road every morning of the campaign. Nor are these stipulations just one way. Allied players threatened with destruction in Waterloo can beat hasty retreats without heed to holding on to such vital points as Quatre Bras, whereas in Napoleon's Last Battles they cannot do so without severe damage to the morale of their armies, while, whatever the advantages in doing so in terms of the game, it is not possible to move either the Anglo-Dutch forces or the Prussians in such a way as completely to ignore their divergent lines of communication.

Waterloo and Napoleon's Last Battles are both games that model the campaign as a whole, but similar considerations apply at the level of games based on the events of 18 June alone. Thus, Napoleon at Waterloo, Day of Battle, Waterloo: Quelle Affaire, and La Belle Alliance (to reiterate, the Waterloo component of Napoleon's Last Battles) all restrict the French to a late-morning start at the earliest (indeed the first-named keeps them inactive until 1300 in the afternoon, a good 90 minutes later than the one usually cited as the moment the guns opened fire), while the historical scenario of Fallen Eagles goes one further by imposing a ban on the movement of any cavalry or guard units until middle and late afternoon respectively, thereby barring the French player from securing almost certain victory over Wellington by throwing all his units into a massive assault on Mont Saint-Jean from the minute battle begins. In other games, however—indeed, sometimes in the very same examples—one again sees something very different: Fallen Eagles, for example, has a scenario that sees the French closed up and ready for action several hours before the battle actually started, the assumption being, of course, that the 12-hour deluge that turned much of the theater of war into a waterlogged morass from the afternoon of 17 June onward never occurred.

To quote Mark Herman once again, "To a greater or lesser extent all historical wargames are abstractions of the reality that they

portray. I see it as a spectrum where at one end you have historically-themed conflict games . . . [and] at the other [ones with] more significant inclusion of historical narrative and context that I label historical wargames.”<sup>43</sup> Pushed to its ultimate limit, the desire to produce packages of this last sort throws the idea of the game out of the window altogether—as has been said of The Battles of Waterloo, “The goal . . . seems not so much [to be] to create alternate outcomes, but to permit one to step into the commander’s shoes and understand why things happened the way they did.”—but, at least to this author, the costs of this strategy render it counterproductive.<sup>44</sup> To coin a phrase, the game is the thing. Meanwhile, where the goal is indeed to create alternative outcomes, it is all too clear that there is another danger. Thus, as Philip Sabin writes, “Once . . . the Waterloo campaign has been modelled as a wargame . . . it is simplicity itself to experiment with . . . changes like different weather, less dilatory French attacks at Quatre Bras or Waterloo, more effective use of [Drouet’s] corps on 16 June or different manoeuvres by Grouchy or Blücher’s troops on 18 June.”<sup>45</sup> Quite so: on the basis of wargames-based analysis, the current author opened his 2016 work, *Napoleon, France and Waterloo: The Eagle Rejected*, with an account of a French victory at Mont Saint-Jean stemming from: a) a decision on the part of the emperor to reinforce Ney with the whole of the infantry of the Imperial Guard in the wake of the fall of La Haye Sainte; and b) an attack on the part of said troops that was infinitely better conducted than the original. To engage in reasoned speculation, however, is not the same as to engage in fantasy; to quote Sabin again, “The results of such experiments will inevitably depend to some extent on the designer’s systemic choices as programmed into the game rules.”<sup>46</sup>

In short, as has already been intimated, wargames are only valuable as a research tool to the extent that they are based on objective analysis that is exclusive of sentiment or partisan feeling. Mean-

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Herman, “Distilling History to its Essence or How to Make Wargames Moonshine,” *C3i Magazine* 2, no. 33 (2019): 25.

<sup>44</sup> See The Battles of Waterloo review “BOW Is Rule Intensive, But a Great Napoleonic-era Strategy and Tactics Game.”

<sup>45</sup> Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 62.

<sup>46</sup> Sabin, *Simulating War*, 62.

while, one could continue with this line of argument still further. Nothing, for example, has been said about the different ways in which the allied forces, in particular, are represented (in brief, are all Wellington's troops simply designated as British, or are they rather recognized as not just British, but also Dutch, Belgian, and German?); confronted with a solid wall of red counters, as is the case with, say, Hundred Days' Battles, the casual gamer might well acquire an impression of the Army of the Netherlands that is wholly misleading. However, the existence of such distortions does not taint the fundamentals of this chapter. So far as these last are concerned, enough has been said to make the point: board wargaming is a field that is rich in the material it offers in respect of the manner in which Waterloo has been remembered. At the same time, it is an activity that has much to teach us. In brief, unless very considerable violence is done to the historical record, the best result that Napoléon is likely to achieve is a draw. In the chapters that remain, then, examples of games at the level of the tactical, the operational, and the strategic will be drawn on to show that this is indeed the case.

Chapter 4



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

A scene from Avalon Hill's Waterloo; the French Army of the North advances across the Belgian border to engage Blücher's Prussians.

*How Many Hexes to Hougomont?*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

The deployment stipulated by the designers of Napoleon at Waterloo. Note the presence of Mouton's command in the French center, the deployment of the French grand battery in a dangerously exposed position ahead of the French front line, and the totally inadequate protection afforded Hougomont.



Chapter 4



*Author's collection, adapted by MGUP*  
A game of Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes in full swing.



*Author's collection, adapted by MGUP*  
“La Garde recule!”—a simple tactical game modelling a situation that is probably better handled by miniatures.

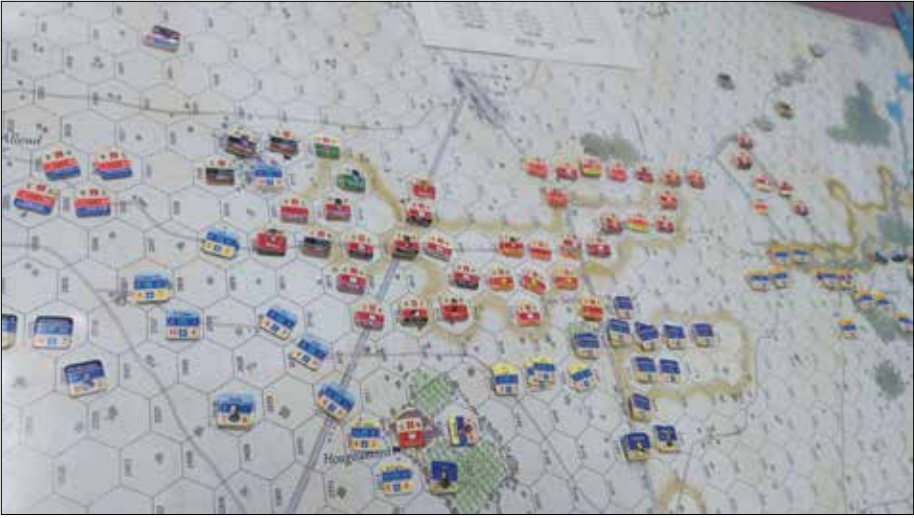
*How Many Hexes to Hougomont?*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

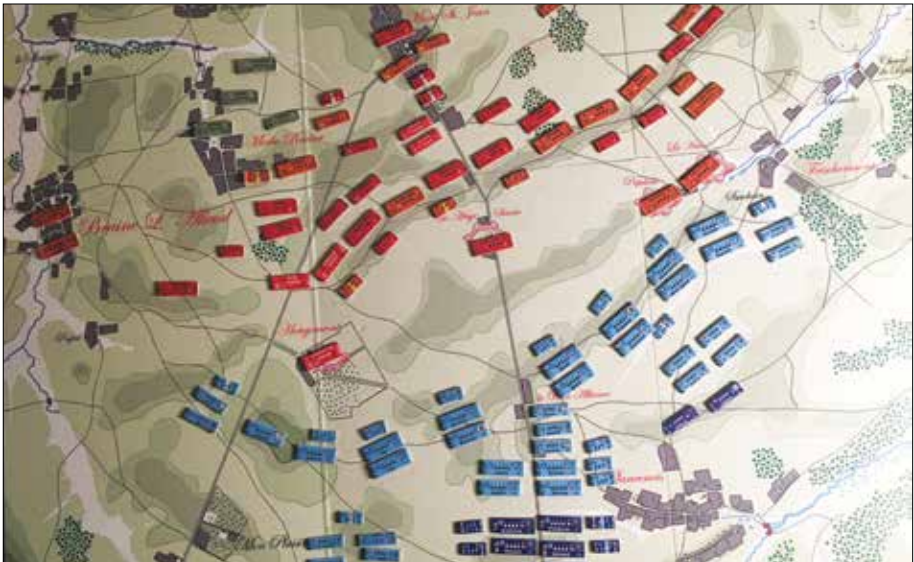
The initial deployment of the rival armies at Waterloo as recommended in Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle. The absence of a garrison in La Haye Sainte is clearly designed to give the French, who always have the first move, an advantage. Note the use of a square grid.

## Chapter 4



*Photo courtesy of Alberto Pomar, adapted by MCUP*

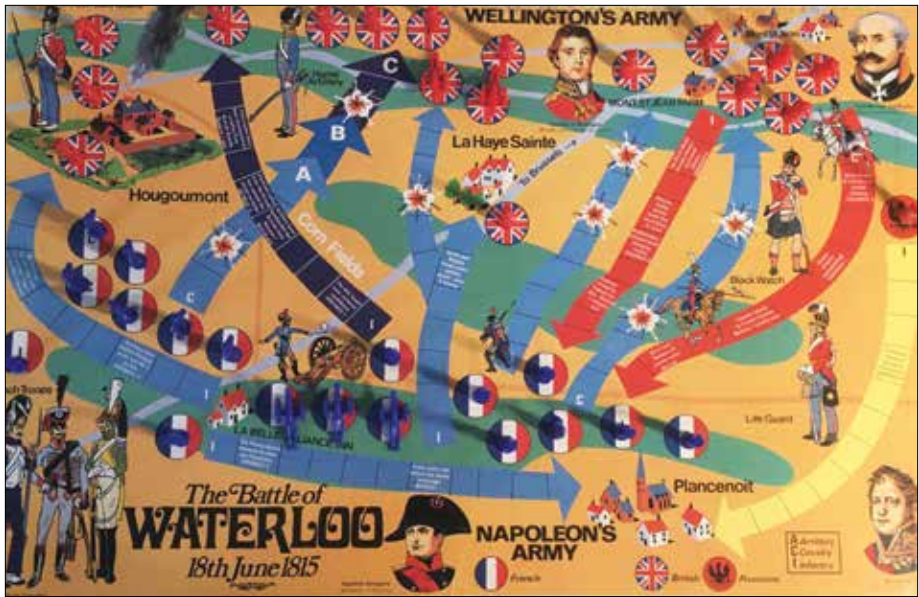
Hexasim's Fallen Eagles: Waterloo, 1815.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

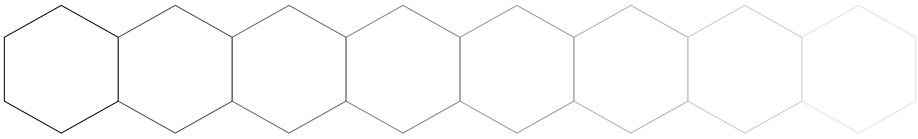
Trafalgar Editions' Waterloo, 1815: Napoleon's Last Battle—as is the case with many games that model the battle, the French cause is much favored by the inclusion of VI Corps at the start of the fighting.

*How Many Hexes to Hougomont?*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Palitoy's 1975 edition of *The Battle of Waterloo*, a good example of a game that overtly favors the French cause.



## Chapter 5

# Historical Hexagons (1)

### *Grand Tactics*

As has already been implied, board games recreating the Waterloo campaign almost all operate at one of the three main levels of generalship, namely the grand tactical, the operational, and the strategic, which may in turn be defined as how armies are managed in the physical presence of an enemy; how armies are maneuvered to bring an enemy to battle or, for that matter, avoid being brought to battle in their turn; and, finally, how war efforts stretching across several different theaters of operations are directed and coordinated. The few exceptions relate to command at a tactical level only—i.e., to the actions of individual battalions or companies—but, as we have seen, perhaps because it is but rarely the business of generals to involve themselves in such matters, this sphere of the art of war has been largely avoided by games designers. In this chapter, however, we shall only be concerned with grand tactics, namely the deployment and manipulation of an army's constituent higher formations, here identified as brigades, divisions, and corps, in the presence of the enemy with a view to breaking what Clausewitz termed an enemy's *means of resisting* and *will to resist*.<sup>1</sup> As for the timeframe and geographical parameters, these are necessarily limited, first, to the day of Waterloo alone and, second, to the scene of the historical battle, or, in other words, the triangle whose angles are marked by the villages of Braine-l'Alleud, Smohain, and Plancenoit. Finally, under consid-

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<sup>1</sup> For Clausewitz's views in this respect, see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Frederick N. Maude (London: K. Paul Trench, Trubner and Co., 1909), 1, viz: "War . . . is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will. Violence . . . is therefore the means: the compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object."

eration as the basis for discussion will be SPI's Napoleon at Waterloo, River Horse's Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!, and Turning Point Simulations' The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD.<sup>2</sup>

So much for the preamble. With this out of the way, we can now move on to the issue of simulation, in which respect let us begin with Napoleon at Waterloo. At first sight, what we have is a somewhat modest offering, the map measuring just 11 inches by 13, the rulebook extending to only four sides of A4, and the counters—most of them cavalry or infantry divisions—numbering no more than 61 (by contrast, other games on the same subject employ maps four or even six times as big, rulebooks that are four or even six times as long, and counters that are 10 or even 20 times as many). If the basic mechanisms of the package deserve much praise, it is evident that two issues caused the designers problems that they found it difficult to overcome: first, the Napoléon fetish that characterizes many of those who play wargames, and all the more so in the American market at which the products of SPI and other companies were primarily directed; and, second, the fact that recreations of Waterloo that have any claim to accuracy cannot but make it very difficult for the French to win, thereby making nonsense of the principle that games should offer both sides an equal chance of victory, the fact being that, so incompetent was French staff work, so numerous the mistakes of Napoléon and, finally, so unfortunate the campaign in respect of the weather, that there was little or no chance of the emperor prevailing when he finally confronted Wellington at Mont Saint-Jean. Not only will an accurate representation of the battle deliver a rather one-

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<sup>2</sup> One issue that will be addressed throughout is the general tendency of games designers to follow the commonly held belief that Napoléon opened the battle with the whole of his wing of the army in command. This, however, was not the case. To reiterate, it is quite clear that VI Corps and the two cavalry divisions that had become attached to it (those of Gen Jean-Siméon Domon and Gen Jacques Gervaise, Baron Subervie) did not reach the field until the early afternoon, and the result is that in each of the games detailed in this chapter, said units were initially held in reserve and only allowed to appear as reinforcements. The effect, of course, is significant: as Napoléon's only chance was to deal with the Anglo-Dutch before the Prussians reached the field, the absence of the four divisions concerned make this task considerably more difficult. In game terms, meanwhile, the effect is significantly to shift the balance in favor of the allies, but the fact that the French player was invariably given the benefit of the doubt in respect of the presence of VI Corps constituted yet another instance of the manner in which the emperor's ghost has been so widely propitiated.

sided game, then, but there is also the question of hindsight. If there is one battle of the centuries prior to 1900 that all gamers will have a grasp of, it is Waterloo, and from this it follows that every tabletop Napoléon can expect that, at a time and place openly specified in the rules, the Prussian Army will appear on the French right flank and engage it in battle. Faced by this threat, there are a number of responses, the two most obvious being either to seek to roll up Wellington's forces from the left in the hope of postponing contact with Blücher until the last possible minute and at the same time avoid being caught in a vise between the two enemy armies, or to hold back part of the army so as to be ready for the Prussian commander when he finally makes his appearance. Had Napoléon known that the Prussians were on the way, these were assuredly moves that the emperor might have made, but there is, alas, a major problem. As we have seen, contrary to almost every published account of the battle, in reality Napoléon had no knowledge whatsoever of Blücher's march from Wavre until Bülow's corps suddenly burst out of the woods beyond the extreme right wing of the French Army of the North at around 1630 and crashed into the flank of Mouton's unsuspecting troops. All this being the case, players taking the part of Napoléon must necessarily be somehow prohibited from responding to the Prussian threat before it makes itself felt on the battlefield: otherwise, what we will have is a game that is very exciting, certainly, but which in no way resembles the events of 18 June 1815.

In other packages, an attempt is made to resolve at least part of the problem by banning the French from stationing any troops east of Papelotte, but this just causes fresh complications, as it was precisely the area concerned that Mouton occupied following his belated arrival on the field in the early afternoon. At stake here is a fundamental question. In brief, is the object to produce a game that offers both players a sporting chance of victory and, at the same time, if such is their desire, the ability to rewrite history in a manner more suited to their tastes, or is it rather to produce a simulation that forces them to act as if they were in the same position as Napoléon or Wellington? Both can be satisfactory exercises—a French commander who can triumph in the distinctly adverse circumstances in which Napoléon found himself in the morning of 18 June 1815 can feel pleased with

himself indeed, while the same applies to an allied one who successfully holds off the French until the Prussians arrive—even useful exercises, and yet, to reiterate a point already made, they are not one and the same and should not be considered as such. Whether it is by delaying the arrival of the Prussians on the field, allowing Grouchy to march to Napoléon's aid, or starting the battle not at 1100 but rather two hours earlier, there are all sorts of ways in which the events of 18 June can be doctored to allow the French a greater chance of victory—in short, to create a game rather than a simulation—but, helpful as this may be in establishing what would have happened in the event of the introduction of this, that, or the other variable, it is of little use if what we are interested in is the situation that actually transpired.

Before going any further, however, let us first engage with the component parts of Napoleon at Waterloo. To begin with the map, this is extremely bland: while the main highways, the villages, and other buildings and the patches of woodland that dotted the battlefield are all shown, no attempt has been made to recreate the succession of ridges over which the battle was fought, the result being that there is no way of representing Wellington's famous use of the reversed slope to the rear of the high ground that marked his front line. That said, it could be argued that this crucial feature of his management of the battle is represented by the fact that for the most part the Anglo-Dutch infantry divisions have a larger number of combat factors than their French counterparts, this ensuring that they will have a built-in advantage when subjected to attack (it could be argued, of course, that, should the Anglo-Dutch Army leave the protection of Mont Saint-Jean, they should immediately lose their advantage, but the need for this adjustment is lessened by the fact that, in the vast majority of games, they will not do this until the later stages of the battle and then only at a point when the French are on the brink of defeat). Something that might be seen as surprising is the manner in which the two Dutch-Belgian infantry divisions are shown as being only marginally inferior to their British counterparts—after all, British accounts of the battle generally treat the Dutch, Belgian, and German units under Wellington's command with great scorn—but, in fact, the decision is easy enough to justify, the forces contributed by the Kingdom of the Netherlands having on the whole performed



quite creditably, and sometimes very creditably indeed (the performance of Chassé's division is the most obvious example, but a further instance may be found in the defense of Papelotte).<sup>3</sup>

This brings us to the composition of the different armies. As noted, in most cases the counters represent divisions or their equivalent, the chief exceptions being the two representing the two British heavy-cavalry brigades. In a few cases, units have, for the sake of convenience, been amalgamated into composite formations—the artillery counters, for example, represent all the guns of the corps of which they are a part, while the five British light-cavalry brigades are subsumed into two fictitious cavalry divisions—but on the whole the order of battle is accurate enough: to take the example of the two corps of line troops with which Napoléon started the battle, as was the case in 1815, that of Drouet has four infantry divisions and that of Reille three. What requires a little more comment, perhaps, is what the rival combat factors denote. On the day of the battle, Napoléon commanded 73,000 men, Wellington 68,000, and Blücher 72,000, but in the game the number of combat factors is not directly related to these figures, in that the first has 89, the second 75, and the third 61, the French therefore getting one combat factor for every 820 men, the British one for every 906 and, the Prussians one for every 1,180.<sup>4</sup> The differences are not very great, but, even so, it can be seen that some effort has been made to reflect the fact that Napoléon's troops were generally of higher quality than all those belonging to the opposition, and, further, that the Prussian forces were worse again than those of Wellington.<sup>5</sup>

So far, so good, but we now come to a feature of the game that does not come up to any expected standard of historical accuracy. In re-

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed assessment that is inclined to support this view, see Veronica Baker-Smith, *Wellington's Hidden Heroes: The Dutch and the Belgians at Waterloo* (London: Casemate, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> We have exact strengths for the two armies that fought at Waterloo: 67,661 for that of Wellington and 71,947 for that of Napoléon. The Prussian figure, by contrast, is an estimate. See David G. Chandler, *Waterloo: The Hundred Days* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 1980), 116–23.

<sup>5</sup> The quality of an army obviously rests on a mixture of factors including leadership, organization, training, morale, tactical doctrine, and armament. That being the case, attempting to sum them up in a single numerical value is difficult, but many historians would agree that this ranking is accurate enough. See, for example, Chandler, *Waterloo*, 52–70.

spect of the issues of deployment and chronology, then, there are four serious problems: first, that Napoléon's VI Corps is shown as being present on the field from the beginning of the battle, when, as we have seen, it did not come up until the early afternoon; second, that the Anglo-Dutch garrisons of the very strong advanced posts constituted by the château of Hougomont and the farms of La Haye Sainte and Papelotte are not adequately represented (indeed, in the last case, not represented at all); third, that, at midday, the battle begins too late; and, fourth, that, at 1500, the Prussians appear on the field well before the time that they first made their appearance, and, still worse, all at once and in the same place. There is a balance of gain and loss here with the first two factors favoring the French and the third and fourth the allies, but the combination of a late start to the battle and an early Prussian arrival exerts a stronger pull than its rival, thereby giving an unfair advantage to Wellington and Blücher. However, to speak in this fashion is to think of Napoleon at Waterloo in terms of gaming only: much more important is the fact that the errors of the game designers in this area render all hope of a historical simulation out of the question.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, there is the issue of the rules. As already noted, these are very short and the cost is necessarily much simplification. No provision is made for skirmishers and differences in formation (infantry, then, cannot form square or switch from column to line and vice versa); other than usually fairly small differences in combat factors, all infantry and cavalry operate in the same way (though the higher combat factors awarded to British infantry divisions may hint at an implicit belief on the part of the designers that the line—their standard combat formation—was inherently superior to the columns favored by their enemy counterparts); units are fully functional and at full strength until they are destroyed, seemingly instantaneously; and there is no attempt to replicate either the fog of war or issues of

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<sup>6</sup> As Napoleon at Waterloo is presented, it is the opinion of the author that the French player cannot win without either: a) the Prussians arriving much later or not at all, or b) Grouchy appearing in the nick of time and bringing succor to Napoléon. In fact, both possibilities are catered for. Grouchy, indeed, gets a full set of counters (these are excluded from the figures given above), but, so far as this discussion is concerned, the issue will be ignored as being irrelevant from the point of view of the simulation on which it is based.

command and control (the rival commanders enjoy a godlike view of the proverbial “other side of the hill” and can literally move their armies at the flick of a finger).

Yet, much of this is either easy to fix (players could, for example, keep all units inverted until they come into contact with the enemy) or defensible (while problems of communication and, by extension, command and control, caused considerable problems in many Napoleonic battles, Waterloo was fought over such a small area that they had far less impact than normal). Certainly, there is no record of any unit’s orders miscarrying or even being overly delayed in their arrival, while there is also the issue of the level of command: after all, both Wellington and Napoléon fought their battles at the level of grand tactics and did not usually concern themselves with the detail of how formations implemented the orders that they were given.<sup>7</sup> Viewed in this fashion, then, the only issue thrown up by the rules that is unequivocally open to question and impossible to deal with in terms of the latter’s existing structures is the manner in which artillery fire is dealt with, the fact that its effects are determined using exactly the same combat-results table as that used for infantry and cavalry, having the unfortunate result of making larger targets less vulnerable than smaller ones. And, finally, if the use of the conventional alternate-move system whereby players take turns to move and fight is at first sight unrealistic, most real battles can be characterized as an extended series of actions and reactions.

One can, then, have reservations, but, if what is wanted is an introductory game, insofar as systems are concerned, Napoleon at Waterloo fits the bill very well, while, as we shall see, the results that it delivers are not out of line with more ambitious attempts to model the battle. At the same time, it has the inestimable merits of being quick to play, many of the alternatives—the most obvious is SPI’s Wellington’s Victory—taking considerably more time to work through than it took Napoléon and his opponents to fight the whole Campaign of the

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<sup>7</sup> Insofar as command and control are concerned, the issue is further elided by the fact that each turn represents one hour of real time, a period easily long enough for a general to get a formation reasonably close to his headquarters on the move and even into action. It should be remembered here that regiments held in reserve or manning quiet sectors of the line were habitually kept under arms in formations that permitted rapid movement.

Hundred Days from start to finish, and, precisely because of the elision of questions of intelligence, particularly suitable for exploration on a solo basis. To demonstrate its value as a tool for the reconstruction of the events of 18 June 1815, we shall now follow the narrative of a particular game move by move. Before proceeding, however, it should be noted that this author has applied a degree of customization so as to correct the errors in deployment and chronology we have already noted and at the same time introduce a small amount of extra detail with regard to the manner of representation, full details of which will be found in the accompanying appendix A (page 299).

To begin, then, the battle is deemed to commence at 1100 in the morning rather than 1200 as specified in the rules. For the most part the units are deployed in the positions stipulated for them by the designers, but here, too, there is a degree of change in that extra 1-4 detachments manufactured by photocopying the single unit of this type supplied with the game are placed in La Haye Sainte and Papelotte, and the incomplete VI Corps of General Mouton, together with the two stray cavalry divisions that had become attached to it, kept off the field pending their arrival in the French right rear in the early afternoon.<sup>8</sup> The forces concerned amounting to no fewer than 10 combat factors, the initial French advantage over the Anglo-Dutch is therefore instantly annulled, while, if the suggestion to the effect that no forces of the Imperial Guard other than the latter's artillery can move until 1500—a reflection of Napoléon's desire to keep it in reserve as long as possible—is followed, the Army of the North will experience the initial loss of a further 25 combat factors.<sup>9</sup> All that is left for the initial assault, then, will be the seven infantry and two cavalry divisions of I and II Corps and the four cavalry divisions of

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<sup>8</sup> A small number of other changes are also recommended, of which the most important is the one precluding the French from stationing artillery in the no-man's-land between them and the Anglo-Dutch front line, but these have much less bearing on the course of play.

<sup>9</sup> Why Napoléon kept back the Imperial Guard is deeply puzzling: after all, even if he was ignorant of the fact that Blücher was marching to join Wellington, he did know that his best chance was at all times to press the two enemy commanders to the utmost and seize every conceivable opportunity to defeat them in detail. In answer, one can but suggest, first, a genuine belief that it would not be needed, and, second, the same nagging sense of self-doubt that had caused him to hold back the guard at Borodino and thereby cast away his sole chance of a decisive victory.

III and IV Cavalry Corps. It is, of course, possible to leave VI Corps in place and allow immediate use of the Imperial Guard on the assumption, first, that the deluge of 17 June did not occur, and, second, that the emperor set aside all other considerations in favor of securing a decisive victory over any enemy army he managed to catch on its own, but, while this is an interesting exercise that will in all probability change the course of events, the battle thus produced will scarcely be that of Waterloo.

To move to the refight, the battle plan adopted by Napoléon was followed in its last detail. Thus, no sooner had Move 1 begun than, on the left, two divisions of Reille's corps assaulted Hougoumont, while, on the right, two divisions of Drouet's corps did the same at Papelotte. Supported in both cases by their corps artillery, the French prevailed at both places, killing or otherwise driving out their defenders, but, clearly realizing that to move forward could expose the troops concerned to being overwhelmed, Wellington refrained from making any riposte other than to bring up the Brunswick corps—actually really only a small division of mixed infantry and cavalry—to buttress his front line above Hougoumont. Eager to exploit these early successes, in Move 2, supported on their left by elements of II Corps and on their right by the rest of I Corps and IV Cavalry Corps, the two left-hand divisions of I Corps stormed La Haye Sainte, albeit at the cost of heavy losses that put the first of them out of action, a desperate attempt to regain the farm on the part of Wellington being thrown back without any great effort.

With the French now in control of all three of the outposts shielding the Anglo-Dutch position, Move 3—deemed to begin at 1400—saw the French make further progress. Thus, on the extreme right the third and fourth divisions of Drouet's corps pressed forward from Papelotte, supported by his corps cavalry and artillery and the whole of IV Cavalry Corps, and drove back the Anglo-Dutch left, the offensive also being joined by two divisions of II Corps, of which these last succeeded in making ground west of La Haye Sainte, only to be counterattacked in their turn, not least by the British heavy cavalry, and forced to relinquish some of their gains.

The respite earned by the cavalry charge was short-lived, however, Move 4 seeing I Corps and IV Cavalry Corps, now reinforced by VI Corps, which had arrived on the field during the previous hour and

come forward to support the attack on Wellington's left, consolidate their positions above Papelotte, and II Corps resume the positions from which it had just been driven, in the face of all of which the Anglo-Dutch could only pull back their cavalry and artillery to keep them safe while at the same time seeking to reinforce those sectors of their line that were coming under pressure. Such passivity, of course, did nothing to wrest the initiative from the French, and the following move therefore saw the latter gain still more ground in the center: so far as the Anglo-Dutch were concerned, then, it was very much a case of, as Wellington famously put it at about the same time in the real battle, "Either night or the Prussians must come."<sup>10</sup>

It was now 1700, and, though losses had been heavy on both sides, it was Napoléon who had the upper hand. Sure that the day was his, in Move 6 the emperor therefore increased the pressure still further, making more gains on the center and right and reinforcing II Corps with the heavy cavalry of the guard, the accompaniment to all this being further heavy losses to the Anglo-Dutch including, most seriously, their only two units of heavy cavalry. Yet, there was at last a flash of hope for Wellington: not only did the first units of Blücher's army appear on the high ground to the southeast, but, seemingly at long last disabused of his abiding fear that Napoléon intended to drive in his right, the British commander called up the troops he had hitherto been using to safeguard his position from such a threat, making use of them in a highly effective attack that destroyed III Cavalry Corps.<sup>11</sup> As the afternoon drew on toward evening, meanwhile, so the

<sup>10</sup> This quote from Wellington is one of a number of remarks he is credited with having uttered in the course of the battle. As such, they are widely quoted—for example, see, in this case, Alessandro Barbero, *The Battle: A New History of Waterloo*, trans. John Cullen (New York: Walker, 2005), 325—but it is recognized that they may be apocryphal, and all the more so as they exist in several different versions. Clayton, for example, renders the comment quoted here as "The Lord send night or Blücher!" Tim Clayton, *Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe's Destiny* (London: Little, Brown, 2014), 514.

<sup>11</sup> One of the few oddities in respect of Wellington's handling of Waterloo is his fixation with the idea that Napoléon was planning to envelop the western flank of his army despite the fact that, even with the given that the French could be assumed to be uncertain of the precise position of the Prussian forces, such a move could not but have the effect of pushing the Anglo-Dutch in the latter's direction. This delusion on the part of the British commander has never been satisfactorily explained, but its effects were clear enough: not only were a disproportionate number of his troops deployed on his right wing, but this last was refused so as to present a defensive front to any

situation improved still further. Thus, although the Prussians, now on the field to the extent of a full corps, were contained by the three divisions of Imperial Guard infantry—until then kept firmly in reserve—improvising a new defensive line east of Plancenoit, I, II, and VI Corps, as well as III and IV Cavalry Corps, suddenly faltered and were checked all along the line.

In the space of a mere two hours, then (it was now 1900) the wheel of fortune had turned full circle. Thus, the sudden collapse of the French attack marked the crisis of the battle, for Napoléon was forced to abandon all hope of breaking the Anglo-Dutch Army, and instead adopt a defensive position resting on Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, and Papelotte, while pulling back much of his surviving cavalry to form a reserve in the rear of his center. At Plancenoit, true, the Imperial Guard mounted an impressive counterattack that inflicted heavy casualties on the leading Prussians, but these losses were quickly replaced by fresh arrivals in the form of two more Prussian corps. Caught up in the torrent, the guards' grenadier division was destroyed, while Wellington threw his whole army into an assault on the enemy line, a move that soon had the French withdrawing from the exposed salient beyond Papelotte, attacked as this was from both sides. By dint of heroic efforts, by 2100, Napoléon had fashioned a new defensive line and, in addition, driven back the allies in several places by mounting local counterattacks, but all too clearly his only hope was a retreat to the southwest. This move, however, was to be denied him, the armies of Wellington and Blücher having now pressed in so closely that it was impossible for the emperor to disengage his forces. Finally brought to bay, the French fought hard and repeatedly forced individual allied units to retreat, but the pressure of numbers was too great even for the best troops to withstand. Amid growing confusion, Papelotte was overwhelmed, La Haye Sainte evacuated, and numerous units destroyed after being left with no means of re-

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outflanking move. Eventually freed by the ever-more-obvious fact that Napoléon had no intention of making a serious move on Wellington's right, the units concerned did at least come to play a part in the battle, albeit not until the day was well advanced. Not so, however, the 17,000 men who had previously been posted to the distant town of Halle so as, in effect, to prolong Wellington's right still further: though no farther away than Blücher was at Wavre, the troops concerned were left without orders all day, waiting for an attack that never came and, still worse, increasingly clearly was never going to materialize.

treat, only the garrison of Plancenoit continuing to hold out in a vain attempt to stem the Prussian tide. Their courage, however, proved unavailing: as the summer night fell so the Army of the North disintegrated, such troops who could streaming away to the southwest in complete disorder. Exactly as was the case in 1815, then, the “flight of the eagle”—the term often given to Napoléon’s bid to regain power—was at an end, while, at 45 combat factors out of 89, Napoléon’s losses were roughly comparable to the 34,000 men that he is generally reckoned as having lost in the actual battle.

More than 50 years old though it is, suitably modified, Wellington at Waterloo can be reckoned an excellent platform on which to base a simulation of the battle: simple and straightforward to work with, it is clearly capable of delivering results that mirror the historical reality (having played through the version of the game detailed here many times over, the author can report that it has never once delivered a French victory and only very rarely a draw). What, however, can be learned from the reconstruction of the events of 18 June 1815? In brief, while there is much to be said about the use of maneuver as a force multiplier in combat, the importance of combined arms, and the need for coup d’oeil, the chief point that comes over is that, given the circumstances that prevailed on the morning of 18 June 1815, Napoléon had little chance of victory. Unable to start the battle until the day was well advanced due to the fact that even those troops who had reached the field were in no state to go into action, temporarily deprived of the services of one of his three infantry corps, and unwilling to commit the Imperial Guard, Napoléon lacked the hitting power necessary to inflict a decisive defeat on Wellington’s forces before being hit by the thunderbolt constituted by the arrival of the Prussians. As we have seen, concentration on the Anglo-Dutch left could drive it in and inflict a lot of damage, but the fact that Blücher’s men could not but hit the Army of the North in its right rear meant that, the more success was obtained, the more likely the troops involved in the assault were to find themselves in a trap. This would have applied as much on the day as in the reconstruction, but in reality the advance on Wellington’s left achieved much less than it did in the latter. We come here to the influence of perhaps the most important event of the battle, namely the famous charge of the Household and Union Brigades. Launched at just the right moment by the com-



mander of Wellington's cavalry, Lord Uxbridge, this caught Drouet's corps at a serious disadvantage—having just hit the Anglo-Dutch line, it was badly disordered—and swept it back in rout. The units representing the heavy cavalry being too weak to have anything like the same effect—it is most unlikely that they would ever be able to mount an attack at odds greater than one to one—nothing of the sort happened in the reconstruction, and so I Corps was able to press on regardless, just as VI Corps was able to march straight across the battlefield and get into action without delay.<sup>12</sup>

Let us next turn to River Horse's Waterloo: *Quelle Affaire!*. Of the more recent 1815 games on the market, this is one of the current author's favorites, being beautifully presented, blessed by rules that are comparatively simple and straightforward—it is one of the very few games based on the events of 18 June 1815 that can be played through in rather less than the time taken by the real battle—and, in contrast to many of its competitors, possessed of components that are wonderfully easy to manipulate, its counters and hexagons alike being twice the size of the norm, something else that eases the pain in this respect being the fact that the rival armies are represented at divisional level only. All that said, its mechanisms are not to be despised: not only do we find morale rules of the sort first introduced in Napoleon at Waterloo, but players find their options limited in each turn, and sometimes cruelly so, by restrictions on their ability, at least straightaway, to activate their formations that neatly represent the fog of war. In consequence, despite a number of oddities—the fact

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<sup>12</sup> Lest it be assumed that altering Napoleon at Waterloo in the manner proposed here is overly harsh, be it said that playing the standard version of the game—something that, on the one hand assumes the arrival on time of the Prussians and, on the other, the absence of Grouchy—has often produced defeats of the French that were even more crushing. Nor has exploring the only other alternative that is remotely plausible—the idea that Grouchy somehow either intercepts Blücher's forces or pulls them away from the battlefield of Waterloo—proved much better for the French, the fact being that, even with the aid of VI Corps, Napoléon does not have the strength to inflict a crushing defeat on Wellington. Proceed to the dream alternative for the French player—Grouchy somehow turning up and Blücher somehow failing to do so—and the result is a very different story, but at the same time one that has no possible basis in reality: not only was the Prussian commander determined to come to Wellington's assistance, but, as we shall see, Grouchy's forces were simply too far away to be able to come within striking distance of either Mont Saint-Jean or Plancenoit by the end of the day.

that Mont Saint-Jean is all but ignored is perhaps the worst—it is a package that, if seen as rather light (a particular grouse is the absence of any attempt to represent such major tactical differences as the British reliance on fighting in line as opposed to the French use of columns), it was generally welcomed by the gaming community, and all the more so, one suspects, as it is possible for either side to win the day.<sup>13</sup>

Let us now turn to a typical battle, albeit one fought in accordance with a number of minor modifications to the standard package, of which the most important is to keep up all the units making up Mouton's command—the 19th and 20th Infantry Divisions, VI Corps' artillery, and the cavalry divisions of Domon and Subervie—off the board until Turn 4, at which point they can be deployed on the board via the road south of Plancenoit.<sup>14</sup>

With matters thus arranged, play proceeded very rapidly. In brief, the French followed a slightly modified version of the plan elaborated by Napoléon, with I Corps moving to attack Wellington's left while II Corps sought to contain Wellington's center and right. Initially, the results obtained were very good in that Drouet's men managed to storm Papelotte almost immediately, but thereafter progress was slowed by a series of successful charges on the part of the Anglo-Dutch heavy cavalry. Attack and counterattack followed one another thick and fast, but it soon became clear that, even with the commitment of not only General Milhaud's cavalry and the light cavalry of the guard, the French were not likely to be able to secure a foothold on Mont

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<sup>13</sup> For some favorable reviews, see “Waterloo—Quelle Affaire!,” *Battlefields and Warriors* (blog), accessed 25 April 2022; and “Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!,” BoardGamesGeek.com, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>14</sup> In detail, the other changes may be summarized thus: the artillery of French II Corps is repositioned to the hexagon separating Kellermann's two cavalry divisions, and the British artillery battery adjacent to Hougomont shifted to the right flank of the 3d Infantry Division, this in turn necessitating moving the counters representing the 2d Infantry Division and 3d and 5th Cavalry Brigades one hexagon further to the west. In addition, it is suggested that no French guard-infantry units can be committed to battle until Turn 7; that no Anglo-Dutch infantry units positioned on, or to the west of, the Nivelles road may move until Turn 5; and, finally, that the Prussians arrive according to a fixed timetable, namely IV Corps (first the 15th and 16th Infantry Brigades, plus the two cavalry formations, and then the 13th and 14th Infantry Brigades plus the artillery) at Point 3–4 on Turns 6 and 7, II Corps at Point 1–2 on Turn 8, and, finally, I Corps at Point 5–6 on Turn 9.

Saint-Jean. That being the case, this sector of the battlefield became gripped by stalemate, this being a situation for which the capture of Hougoumont by elements of II Corps shortly after three in the afternoon was but little compensation. At around the same time, Mouton's command finally reached Plancenoit, but all chance that it might tip the balance in favor of the French at Papelotte was swept aside by the dramatic eruption of the first elements of Bülow's corps onto the battlefield and, with it, the destruction of the cavalry division attached to I Corps, this last having been detached as a flank guard.

The arrival of the Prussians now placed the French at a serious disadvantage, the number of strength points they had to eliminate to rout their opponents being instantly raised from 30 to 50. To all intents and purposes, this meant that Napoléon's cause was lost, but for some while the battle continued to rage on and even to take on a character that was increasingly pro-French, Kellermann's cavalry corps inflicting serious damage on the Anglo-Dutch right flank and the infantry of the guard not only driving back Bülow's forces, but also hitting II Corps very hard when it came up to reinforce them. A belated advance on the part of some of the troops making up Wellington's center doing little to redress the balance, the onset of dusk therefore found Napoléon in a position that was by no means unsatisfactory in tactical terms. At only 3 strength points, meanwhile, the emperor's losses were dwarfed by the 25 suffered by his opponents, the fact being that he had at the very least survived and could even harbor some hope of transforming tactical success into strategic triumph the following day. Lest Bonapartist hearts should be inflamed by this prospect, however, the game's rules make it quite clear that this is not enough: to all intents and purposes, failure to inflict the level of casualties deemed necessary wholly to break the allied armies equates to a French defeat, come what may.

For one last attempt to investigate the extent to which historical simulations recreating the grand tactics employed by the contending armies and their commanders on 18 June 1815, let us turn to *The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD*. With a complexity rating on the scale developed by the BoardGameGeek website (see Ludography in appendix B) of 3.5, as opposed to 2.22 for *Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!* and only 1.9 for *Napoleon at Waterloo*, this is clearly in a different league in terms of its aspirations, and it cannot be said that the result is worth the

distinctly cumbersome game system with which the gamer is confronted. Not only is there insufficient tactical abstraction for a product in which the smallest tactical formation is generally the division, but the need to keep track of divisional, corps, and army losses makes for a surfeit of recordkeeping, while the overly complex combat results chart is inclined to produce lengthy tactical exchanges that even the most hardened of gamers are likely to find downright wearisome.<sup>15</sup> All this, meanwhile, is compounded by a tendency to cram too many of the rather small counters into too small a space (a single hexagon represents a width and depth of around 1,000 yards) and, above all, far too much in the way of stacking, this last, in particular, giving rise to a considerable degree of frustration on the part of the current author, though it is accepted that those with nimbler fingers may find themselves less challenged. Add in a starting time of 0600 in the morning rather than the usual 1100 (see below), and the result is a package that is distinctly daunting. That said, it is also one that produces a Waterloo that is reasonably plausible, and is therefore a worthy candidate for discussion in this chapter. For those who wish to explore alternative fashions in which the day could have gone, scenarios are provided that assume that Napoléon detached VI Corps in pursuit of Blücher in the wake of Ligny instead of that of Vandamme—a choice that would have made much more sense and greatly speeded up Grouchy's movements (as the designers point out, at the end of the battle Mouton and his men were not only better placed to pursue the retreating Prussians, but squarely in the path of any attempt of III Corps to do so)—and/or that the confrontation between Maurice Gérard and Grouchy at Walhain saw the former prevail, the result in either case being a good chance that the corps of Georg von Pirch or Hans von Ziethen never make the field. However, in this instance, it is, of course, the historical situation that was preferred, though the decision was taken to omit Turns 1–5 as these do no more than recreate the desperate struggles of the Army of the North just to get to the battlefield in the wake of the downpour of the previous night, an exercise that shows very neatly the impossibili-

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<sup>15</sup> Napoleon at Waterloo, Napoleon's Last Battles, and Waterloo: Quelle Affaire! all feature rules that allow for the progressive disintegration of the rival forces, but, crucially, they do so at army level only.

ty of Napoléon launching an attack before 1100 in the morning, and even then, still without the benefit of his full strength.<sup>16</sup>

As with the other two games that we have covered in this chapter, the action commenced with a massive attack on Wellington's left wing, this being supported, needless to say, both with a massive artillery bombardment and an advance on the part of Reille's corps designed not so much to attack the troops facing it as to protect Drouet's left. Chief targets were the Hanoverian brigades of Colonels Ernst von Vincke and Charles Best, and these were driven back by the divisions of Durutte and Donzelot, leaving those of Marcognet and Quiot to form a local reserve and screen Papelotte. Nor was this the limit to the French movements, Milhaud moving up to support I Corps, and Mouton occupying the Smohain area while sending General Jean-Siméon Domon's cavalry to watch the eastern approaches to the battlefield.

By midday, then, Wellington was already under heavy pressure, and this was soon augmented still further, a desperate counterattack on the left being flung back with heavy losses, the next couple of hours seeing the garrison of Papelotte overwhelmed and Wellington's right hit by a massive cavalry charge led by Marshal Ney, the only bright spot for the allies being the appearance of the first Prussian forces to reach the field in the shape of Wilhelm von Schwerin's cavalry, these last defeating Domon and only being repelled by the timely intervention of the Young Guard.<sup>17</sup> Evidently heartened by the appearance of the Prussians, the Anglo-Dutch left rallied and succeeded in breaking Donzelot's division, the position of the French then being worsened still further by the arrival of a large part of Bülow's corps, the danger posed by the latter only being checked by a counterattack on the part of Milhaud. Only on the left, then, could the battle be said to be going even partly Napoléon's the way, an attack by Reille suc-

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<sup>16</sup> The French Army, then, were drawn up in positions that reflected those occupied at 1100 in the morning of 18 June with the difference that VI Corps was deemed to have advanced rather farther than it did in reality, and, indeed, actually to have occupied Plancenoit, this being a response to the fact that the designers have the first Prussians reach the field at least two hours earlier than was actually the case.

<sup>17</sup> The inclusion of Ney in the French command structure is extremely problematic: while his presence in the French front line can scarcely be denied, his authority was limited to I and II Corps alone, and it might therefore have been better to exclude him from the game.

ceeding in breaking the Hanoverian brigade of Major General Friedrich von Kielmansegg, albeit at the cost of General Maximilien Foy's division. That said, efforts to exploit this success were driven back by fresh cavalry attacks, while Hougoumont remained firmly in the hands of the defenders.

With the time now standing at 1600, the battle was still in the balance, but there now began a process that was to swing victory ever further away from the French, for not only did the losses of Reille's corps reach such a level that it was deemed to have become demoralized and was therefore forced to fall back to reorganize, but a brigade of guard light cavalry that was supporting it was destroyed fighting off successive waves of attackers near Hougoumont.<sup>18</sup> Still worse, perhaps, on the right flank the sturdy efforts of the Young Guard to combat Bülow's forces were countered by the arrival on the fringes of the battlefield of Pirch's corps, this last heading straight for the village of Agiers in a clear attempt to envelop the troops blocking the Prussian offensive from the south. The French were not yet finished, true—on the left, for example, heroic efforts on the part of Ney at the head of Kellermann's corps and the cavalry of the Imperial Guard inflicted such heavy losses on Wellington's troops that the Reserve Corps became demoralized in its turn—but the next two hours saw them driven from Papelotte and Smohain alike, the situation only being restored thanks to the commitment of the grenadiers of the Middle Guard. As afternoon shifted to evening, so matters grew still worse, the battered remains of I Corps collapsing in rout and the Young Guard being driven from Plancenoit, a much humbled Napoléon therefore being left with no option but, in effect, to accept defeat and direct what could be saved of Drouet's forces to retire on Genappes under the protection of the shaky line represented by such troops as remained in action of the Imperial Guard, the two reserve cavalry

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<sup>18</sup> The process of reorganization is too complex to explain here, but, in brief, it allows damaged formations to recover strength points lost in combat and thereby regain the capacity to fight effectively (corps that are demoralized are subjected to various penalties including, not least, a reduction in their morale and an accelerated loss rate). To undertake this operation, it is first necessary to fall back beyond the movement span of the nearest enemy unit, and then ensure that that distance is maintained, if necessary at the cost of further retreats.

corps, and the commands of Mouton and Reille, still in a state of decomposition though this last was.

All this, however, was a case of too little, too late. Had retreat been ordered at the time the Prussians first arrived, much of the army engaged at Waterloo could have been saved to fight another day, but, as at Leipzig in 1813, Napoléon had allowed his faith in his star to carry him away. Whatever the truth of this, the results could not have been more disastrous. Thus, pressing in against the French right, the Prussians reduced both VI Corps and the guard to a state of demoralization. No longer attempting to make even a pretense of resistance, the whole French Army headed for the rear, only to find that for many of the men who had been fighting on the right there was no escape, the Old Guard, the Voltigeurs of the Young Guard, the foot artillery of the guard and General Jean-Baptiste Jeanin's division of VI Corps all being pinned down and left to face a destruction that had become utterly inevitable. By the time that darkness fell around 2100 in the evening, then, it was all over, all that Napoléon was left with being a mass of panic-stricken fugitives streaming southward in the hope of reaching the safety of the French frontier. To the east, Grouchy's command was still intact, but, with the Austrians and Russians poised to cross the Rhine, the future held nothing but abdication and, if not a firing squad, then exile to Saint Helena.<sup>19</sup>

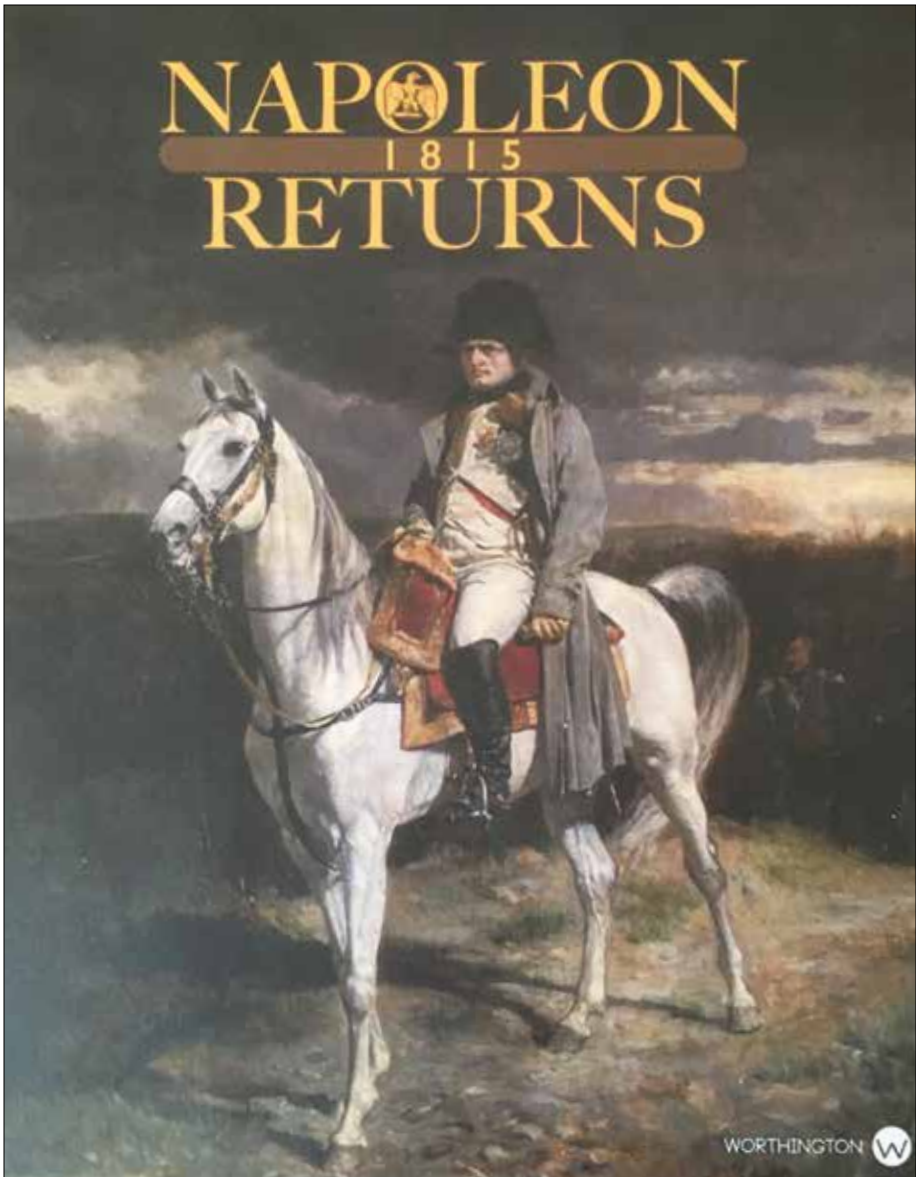
In sum, then, it can be seen that using an appropriate board war-game to simulate the events of 18 June 1815 is a worthwhile exercise, not least because, properly configured, it immediately confronts anyone who tries it with the very difficult task that Napoléon faced on the morning of Waterloo, namely, having to break an enemy commanded by the best general his many opponents had ever fielded ensconced in excellent defensive positions at the head of an army that had already lost much of its hitting power, and that in the face of significant time pressures. While the results obtained from all three of the games that we have examined suggest that success was beyond the talents of the emperor and the prowess of his troops alike, in the actual battle the French nonetheless came very close to securing at

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<sup>19</sup> In retrospect, this playing of *The Day of Waterloo* was marred by the failure to rectify the absurdly early arrival time stipulated for the Prussians: had they been deemed to arrive at 1600 in the afternoon rather than 1400, the destruction of Napoléon's right could never have achieved the same momentum.

least a draw, if not a marginal victory, for throwing in the grenadiers and chasseurs of the Imperial Guard in a far more coherent fashion than was actually the case at 1800 rather than 1900 might just have broken Wellington's army and given the Prussians, at least some of whose commanders were deeply suspicious of the British, sufficient cause for alarm for them to break off their attack and fall back on Wavre. Yet, what such a result would have availed Napoléon is unclear: with much of his cavalry exhausted, the emperor could not have exploited his defeat of the Anglo-Dutch, the outcome being that Wellington could have escaped to the near-impregnable fortress of Antwerp just as Blücher would have retreated to Liège and possibly even beyond the Rhine. It is true that Brussels would have fallen, but it seems unlikely either that the population of Belgium would have risen in support of Napoléon or that the coalition facing him would have fallen apart. If the one had bitter memories of many years of French occupation, the other was absolutely rock-solid in its determination to bring down a man who had just proved once and for all that he was impossible to contain within the normal parameters of international relations. The war, then, would have continued, but, as the simulations of a wider nature covered in the chapters that follow show, it was not one that the French would have been able to win.





*Author's collection*

A typical example of historical simulation box art. Many wargamers are mesmerized by Napoléon and the industry knows this all too well.

## *Historical Hexagons (1)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon at Waterloo, at 1200 in the afternoon. The absence of VI Corps means that the emperor is unlikely to defeat Wellington's army in a single assault.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon at Waterloo, 1500 in the afternoon. Mouton's command has at last arrived on the field, while Wellington has been driven from Pappelote. "Either night or the Prussians must come!"

## Chapter 5



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Napoleon at Waterloo, 1700 in the afternoon. By throwing Mouton's command against Wellington's left, the emperor has made further progress, but the leading troops of Bülow's corps have just emerged from the Bois de Paris.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Napoleon at Waterloo, 2100 in the evening. The Prussians having arrived in strength, the French Army of the North faces disintegration.

## *Historical Hexagons (1)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
The initial deployment specified by Waterloo: Quelle Affaire! Note, however, the absence of Mouton's command from Napoléon's center.

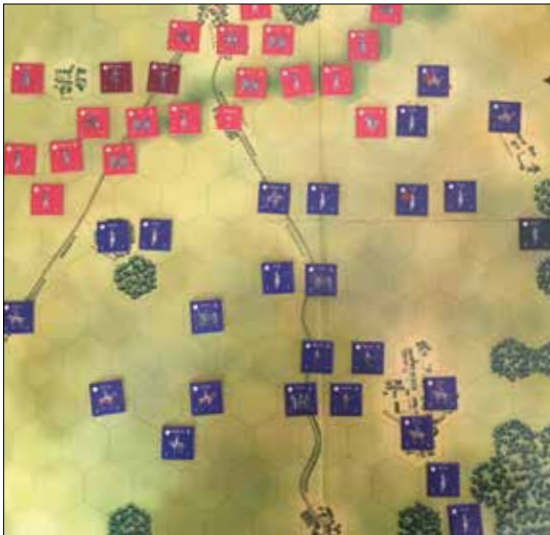


*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Early afternoon in Waterloo: Quelle Affaire!. In the continued absence of Mouton, Napoléon has been able to do more than take Papelotte.

## Chapter 5



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo, Quelle Affaire!, late afternoon. Mouton is coming up from the rear, but the Prussians are already on the field.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo, Quelle Affaire!, evening. By dint of much hard fighting, VI Corps and the guard have checked the Prussian onrush, but all hope of a French victory has gone.

*Historical Hexagons (1)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD, the situation at 11:00 in the morning.

Chapter 5



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD, the situation at 1400 in the afternoon.

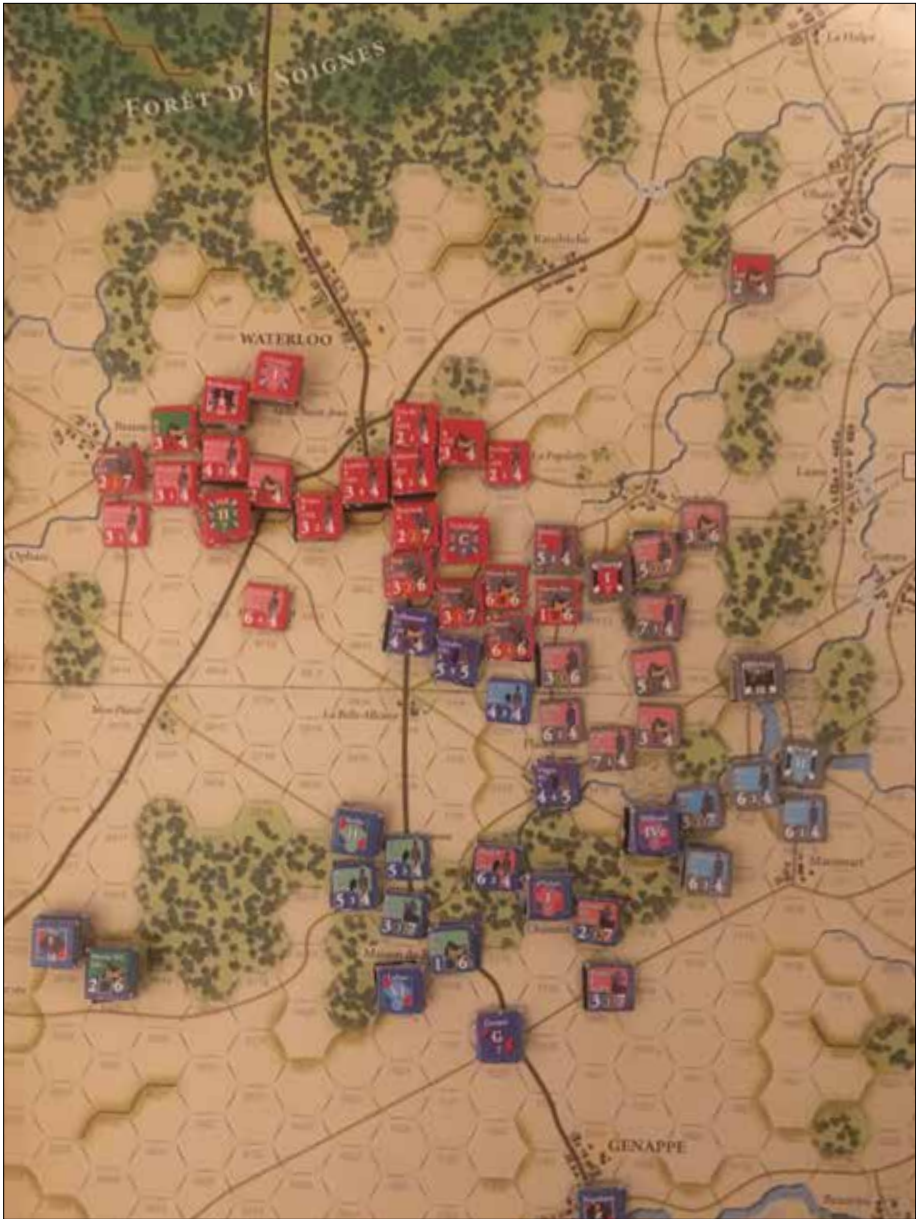
*Historical Hexagons (1)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD, the situation at 1900 in the evening.

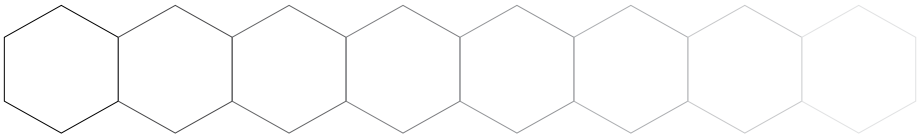


Chapter 5



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD, the situation at 2100 in the evening. The French flee the field with Napoléon firmly in the lead.



## *Chapter 6*

# Historical Hexagons (2)

## *Operations*

If grand tactics is the art of maneuvering armies in the presence of an enemy with a view to securing victory, operations is that of maneuvering them in-theater to bring said enemy to battle on terms that are the most favorable available. This being the case, the object of our attention in this chapter must be, not the Battle of Waterloo itself, but rather the events of the three days that preceded the conflict and, more specifically, the passage of the Belgian frontier by the French Army of the North, the concentration of the armies of Blücher and Wellington, the marches that produced the battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras, and, finally, the retreat of the two allied commanders to Mont Saint-Jean and Wavre, these being coupled, of course, with the efforts of the French to follow up their initial successes. It is, beyond doubt, to this level of historical simulation that aficionados of the board wargame are most drawn as it allows them to engage in sweeping strategic movements, while admirers of Napoléon, in particular, are inclined to lick their lips at the prospect of securing victory for their hero, the emperor's chances of defeating his Prussian and Anglo-Dutch opponents being much better on 16 June than they had become just two days later. Add to this the fact that the situation—an army that is badly outnumbered striving desperately to defeat its enemies in detail before they can unite to bring it down—constitutes a fascinating military problem in and of itself, and the result is the production of the steady procession of games that we see in the ludography, namely *Waterloo*; *Napoleon: The Waterloo Campaign, 1815*; *1815: The Waterloo Campaign*; *Hundred Days Battles*; *Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle*; *Waterloo 20*; *Napoleon Returns*,

1815; Les cent-heures de Waterloo: la campagne de Belgique de 1815; and Waterloo Campaign 1815 (two other packages may be added that tackle both the tactical and the operational levels of warfare, namely Napoleon's Last Battles and Napoleon's Last Gamble: Battles of the Hundred Days). In this chapter, we shall be focusing on just two of the above—namely Hundred Days Battles and Waterloo Campaign 1815—but, before going any further, it is worth pointing out the major problem that besets every attempt to simulate the campaign of the Hundred Days. As has already been implied, the mistakes in the conduct of operations that marred the real thing are never likely to be mirrored in a refight, the fact being that no French player with even the most basic knowledge of the campaign would ever deprive themselves of Drouet's corps for the whole of 16 June just as no allied one is ever likely to have Bülow drag his feet when it comes to him being ordered to march from Liège to join Blücher. In consequence, what one tends to be left with are intensely competitive contests that only follow historical precedent in a general sense, useful though this might be as a way of exploring what would have happened if things had gone more smoothly for Napoléon.<sup>1</sup>

Given the rather dismal record of the Army of the North in the refights featured in this book, let us begin by offering a little succor to admirers of Napoléon. Thus, the first of the packages examined in connection with this chapter, namely Victory Point Games' Waterloo 20, produced a campaign of the Hundred Days that was crowned by a decisive French victory. One of a long series of games recreating famous battles of the Napoleonic era that makes use of a common set of generic rules boosted, in each case, by a supplement laying out additions, clarifications, and other changes necessitated by the particular subject, the hallmark throughout being accessibility (the mechanics, then, are very simple, and the unit counters very few

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<sup>1</sup> In fairness, there are ways by which these issues can be dealt with; Napoleon's Last Battles, for example, dealing with the lethargy and poor staff work that reigned in the Army of the North throughout the campaign by ruling that no French unit can move before 1100 in the morning. In the case of the games analyzed in this chapter, commands that were especially badly affected could be frozen in place for the periods in question, but it has rather been decided to allow events simply to take their course. For a discussion of some of the issues concerned, see Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 122–23.

in number: there are, in fact, just 19—one short of the 20 featured in the title of each game). With hexagons spanning, on average, 1.2 km of ground in every direction and almost no counter representing anything than a corps of infantry or cavalry, the result cannot but be much abstraction and, with it, much disappointment for those seeking to engage with the detail of grand tactical combat in the Napoleonic age. Insofar as the current author is concerned, however, this is all to the good, for, as he has already observed, games that seek to operate at the operational level should avoid the sort of matters of detail that are the job of regimental, brigade, and divisional commanders, a verdict with which the wargames community would seem happy to concur. As one online review put it, “More and more I have started to realize that immersion is what it is really about for me. Immersion breaks when games are too complex, and I need to look . . . up rules and . . . combat-results charts. The more my focus is on the board and the battle, the more fun I find the game.”<sup>2</sup> Simplicity, however, is not the same as stupidity. On the contrary, *Waterloo 20* and its stablemates are anything but dreary exercises in counter pushing in which all is determined by throws of the dice. At the heart of the package, then, is a mechanism for measuring the morale of the rival armies that makes charging headlong into battle distinctly inadvisable. Thus, at the start of the game each side is allotted a fixed number of morale points (in the case of *Waterloo 20*, eight for the French and seven for the allies). As the game progresses, these can be augmented and depreciated, and it would not make sense if the results of combat did not play a part in this. However, it is not just a matter of inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy, generals also having to take account of the wear and tear that a high level of aggression can inflict on their own troops: all-out attacks and forced marches can be found to be so taxing as to be self-defeating. (Because each commander knows that, should the morale of their forces be reduced to zero, they automatically lose the game, the logic being that any army so ill-used would simply disintegrate.) Thanks to this simple innovation, morale is no longer simply a function of body count. Equally important, meanwhile, are the measures taken by the designers to

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<sup>2</sup> For the full review and others like it, see “*Waterloo 20*,” Forums/Reviews, Board-GamesGeek.com, accessed 3 May 2022.

ensure that the players are not left free to run the campaign as they think fit, these centering on the use of a deck of chance cards for each side from which each of them has to draw at the start of each move. As with any such decks, the results can be positive or negative, but the French, in particular, can find that their articulation is significantly reduced, or that particular units fail to move in the manner desired or, alternatively, suddenly rush headlong into the enemy without the slightest heed for the consequences. That said, the French do on the whole do rather better from the cards than the allies, a good example of the way designers can privilege Napoléon without resorting to outright crudity.<sup>3</sup>

So much for the package, but what of the game? Insofar as this is concerned, the action began at 1200 on 16 June with the French well across the frontier and bearing down on the Prussians and Anglo-Dutch, of which the former are concentrated in the vicinity of Ligny and the latter scattered across the countryside between Mont Saint-Jean and Quatre Bras. As can be imagined, the first three moves (afternoon, dusk, and evening, each daytime turn representing between three and four hours in terms of real time) were dominated by efforts on the part of Napoléon on the one hand to shatter Blücher and on the other to ensure that Wellington could not come to his Prussian ally's aid. In this task, he was much hindered by a series of unlucky chance cards and combat results, and at Ligny, in particular, the fighting swayed to and fro without any sign of a favorable result for the French. Yet with Wellington unable to intervene—a fact that, as in real life, rendered his successful defense of Quatre Bras quite meaningless—by the end of the day, the relentless French pressure finally obtained the desired result, the Prussians flee-

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<sup>3</sup> A further factor in favor of the French is the representation of their army: setting aside the fact that the existence of the four corps of reserve cavalry—a clear advantage that even the most pro-allied game designer could never have dared ignore—gives them a considerable head start in and of itself, as at least one reviewer has pointed out, the numerical superiority of the allies does not get the weighting that it should. Thus, if one compares the strength of the units Napoléon actually had available at Waterloo with those his opponents either initially fielded or got into action later in the day, the emperor emerges slightly ahead of the allies. See Paul Comben, “Winning through Wear and Tear—A Boardgaming Way Analysis of Waterloo 20,” *Boardgaming Way*, 16 June 2015.

ing northward in the direction of Mont-Saint-Guibert covered by the sole corps to have survived the battle (that of Thielmann).<sup>4</sup>

Evidently apprised of the defeat of Blücher rather earlier than was the case in 1815, Wellington made use of the night that followed to beat a hasty retreat in the direction of Mont Saint-Jean, the hours of dark also seeing the Prussians continue to flee northward under cover of a rear guard much augmented by the appearance of Bülow's corps in the vicinity of Gembloux (unlike day turns, night ones are deemed to last for around 10 hours rather than the usual 3–4; however, in reflection of the difficulties of moving large numbers of men in darkness, movement rates are not increased in proportion with the extra time, the only real difference between the two being that there are no combat phases). The French pursuit having been slow to get off the ground—Napoléon evidently felt that it was better to get his army into a better degree of order than to hurl his tired men into the darkness willy-nilly—at first, it seemed that the allies might have got clear away, but, while this was indeed the case in respect of the Prussians, a lucky chance card enabled the French left to catch up with Wellington's forces in the course of the morning, the result being a sharp clash at Genappe in which the latter suffered a clear defeat. Thus delayed in their march, the Anglo-Dutch then had to endure a further series of attacks, but, by the early afternoon, they had managed to disengage and fall back on the hamlet of Plancenoit, the same period of the day seeing the French suffer an unexpected setback when a hasty attack on Bülow was repelled with contemptuous ease.

If the Army of the North was very far from having things all its own way, at this point victory looked well within Napoléon's grasp. However, exactly as was the case at this point on the real 17 June,

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<sup>4</sup> One event that is not covered by the chance cards is the possibility that the Prussians could have responded to defeat at Ligny by fleeing eastward rather than moving north so as to stay in touch with the Anglo-Dutch forces, and it may be felt that the possibility should have been covered, possibly through the inclusion of a special die throw. While the author has never gamed through the consequences of such an event, it is difficult to see how Wellington could possibly have maintained the field had Blücher and his chief of staff, MajGen August, Count Neidhardt von Gneisenau, behaved in this fashion. That said, whether based on the evidence of the game or such estimates as can be put forward from a reading of the reality, frustrating the prompt retreat on Antwerp that would beyond doubt have been his response does not seem very likely to have been within the capacity of the French.

the heavens opened, the whole theater of operations immediately being subjected to a deluge that brought all operations to a halt and Wellington's forces in consequence enabled to occupy the definitive fighting position that had been selected for them stretching from Hougoumont to Papelotte, where they were joined by the welcome reinforcements constituted by the corps of Sir Rowland Hill. By the evening, then, the Army of the Netherlands was safe, a point demonstrated with some emphasis when yet another unlucky chance card, this time one featuring unhinged behavior on the part of Marshal Ney, led to Milhaud's IV Reserve Cavalry Corps making a completely unsupported attack on Wellington's right that was driven off in short order. With the rain now coming down again in torrents after a brief let-up, all action came to a halt other than for the arrival of the main body of the Army of the North in the area around La Belle Alliance and Plancenoit. As for the Prussians, meanwhile, having completely outstripped the forces pursuing them under Marshal Grouchy, they were now safely grouped in and around Wavre, everything therefore being set for the climactic battle of 18 June.

In the real version of Waterloo, as we know, not a shot was fired until 1130, but, in this particular refight, action began somewhat sooner thanks to a probing attack on Hougoumont that was made to cover the deployment of the rest of Napoléon's command. This maneuver, however, was beaten off with ease, the main events of the first turn of the day rather taking place to the east (that no general attack took place at Waterloo is, perhaps, surprising, but the rules lay down that the countryside would have been deep in mud, movement factors being reduced to such an extent in consequence that delivering a more powerful blow is very difficult, if not impossible). Thus, no sooner had the day dawned than the bulk of the Prussian Army had emerged from its sodden bivouacs at Wavre and got on the road for Chapelle Saint-Lambert and, beyond that place, Plancenoit. Having arrived at Mont-Saint-Guibert, meanwhile, the sound of the guns at Mont Saint-Jean led Grouchy to a crucial decision. Instead of sending his entire command in the direction of Wavre as laid down in the latest instructions he had received from Napoléon, he rather split his forces in two, directing Maurice Gérard's IV Corps and the I Reserve Cavalry Corps of Claude-Pierre Pajol to keep going in that direction while Dominique-René Vandamme's III Corps and Rémy Exelmans's

II Reserve Cavalry Corps branched off to the northwest in a bid to seize Chapelle Saint-Lambert: this, as we shall see, was in many respects to be the most crucial decision of the entire campaign.<sup>5</sup>

To return to the confrontation at Waterloo, midday saw the impending battle break out in all its intensity in that Napoléon sent his forces into the attack all along the line that succeeded in taking La Haye Sainte and breaking the corps of the Prince of Orange, only to be faced by ferocious resistance and eventually thrown back to his starting positions, a result that was scarcely welcome given the fact the fierce fighting that broke out in the vicinity of Chapelle Saint-Lambert between the oncoming Prussians and the troops dispatched by Grouchy produced a major disaster in the form of the destruction of Exelmans's cavalry. That said, however, French resistance was such that the Prussians made little progress in respect of joining the main battle. Indeed, as the afternoon wore on, their position significantly worsened in that Vandamme and Pajol succeeded in not only taking Wavre but also breaking the Prussian forces holding it

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<sup>5</sup> As is discussed elsewhere, Grouchy's refusal to march to the sound of the guns destroyed the only chance of Napoléon avoiding eventually being confronted with overwhelming numbers at Waterloo. While there is no way that he could have reached the battlefield, by marching on Chapelle Saint-Lambert in the manner suggested here, and, indeed, gamed through in chapter 8, he could in theory, though far from necessarily, have kept Prussian aid to Wellington to the corps of Bülow alone. So as not to allow the unfortunate marshal to do the obvious and ignore Wavre in favor of providing his imperial master with all the help he could, the matter was decided by the throw of a die, with a one or a two signifying ignoring the sound of battle in favor of heading for Wavre with all his men, a three or four the division of his force in the manner described here, and a five or six a dash for Chapelle Saint-Lambert with every man at his disposal. The number that came up being a three, it was the middle course that was chosen, but it has to be recognized that even this decision was scarcely limited in its effects, Napoléon's initial orders having taken Grouchy far to the east before he finally turned north in the direction in which the Prussians had headed. In consequence, it was not Mont-Saint-Guibert that witnessed the famous argument between Grouchy and Gérard, but rather the much more distant settlement of Walhain. Though not shown on the map provided in *Waterloo 20*, this lay on its extreme eastern edge, and the result was that, in terms of our refight, any troops from Grouchy's command would have had at least two moves extra to cover before they could reach Chapelle Saint-Lambert. Yet, be this as it may, there is nothing to stop the French player simply heading straight for Mont-Saint-Guibert, it being precisely this sort of difficulty that makes operational-level games based on the Waterloo campaign so problematic.



and began to close in on the rear of the troops fighting at Chapelle Saint-Lambert.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the failure of the Prussians to make significant progress against the French right flank was beginning to make its presence felt at Mont Saint-Jean: unable to take any more, around 1800 both General Rowland Hill's corps and the Anglo-Dutch reserve were broken and fled the field, leaving Napoléon free to take control of Hougomont, a success that was only partly countered by the fact that Blücher at last succeeded in reaching Plancenoit, an action that also saw the destruction of Mouton's corps. All that was left to Wellington was now Uxbridge's cavalry, and this could do no more than fall back on Waterloo in the hope of covering the flight of the thousands of fugitives streaming back along the Brussels high road, a gallant effort that was, however, quickly overcome, the survivors of the Anglo-Dutch horsemen dissolving in rout in their turn. On the eastern flank, the Prussians were still in action, but, left to their own devices, as even the combative Blücher was forced to recognize, they could not hope to prevail, the result being that no sooner had night fallen than they were making their way off the field in search of safety.

Whether such a victory would have produced any strategic result is a matter discussed at length elsewhere, but, notwithstanding the various hidden advantages proffered to the French cause by the package's designers, this experiment with Waterloo 20 does at least suggest that, with better management of his forces, Napoléon might have secured success at Waterloo. That said, the other products considered in this chapter do not offer quite the same comfort to admirers of the emperor. Next stop in this respect is the magazine game, Waterloo Campaign 1815. As already noted in chapter 4, this contribution to the ludography deserves high marks for presentation, but this is not the issue that concerns us here. Much more important are the game mechanics. Units, then, are, for the most part, corps (though most of the latter are provided with detachments that can be dropped off for the purposes of screening their parent formations); hexagons are areas of ground approximately 1 km across; and turns

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<sup>6</sup> In Waterloo 20, to break a unit is but one step removed from complete annihilation, formations that suffer such a result being removed from the board with the not very certain possibility of being rallied and got back into action in the course of the next night's turn.

equal 12 hours of real time.<sup>7</sup> As for command, meanwhile, this is represented by the presence of leaders (in the case of the allies, Wellington and Blücher only, but in that of the French, Napoléon, Ney, and Grouchy, the consequence of this arrangement being to confer much greater flexibility on the Army of the North), and the provision that no unit may move unless it is within the control radius of an appropriate figure. Finally, as in *Waterloo 20*, combat is based on differentials rather than odds, what counts therefore not being the ratio between the two sides' strength points, but rather the difference between them, a system that is much disliked by some gamers but certainly tends to make the calculations involved that much more straightforward.

Insofar as the operations covered by *Waterloo Campaign 1815* are concerned, players are offered two alternatives: one that begins on the morning of 15 June with Napoléon and his troops still in France and a second that rather takes up the story as it was 24 hours later, with the French poised to attack Wellington and Blücher at *Quatre Bras* and *Ligny*. Of these it was the first that was selected, and thus it was that the action opened with the Army of the North pushing across the bridges over the river *Sambre* at *Marchienne-au-Pont*, *Charleroi*, and *Chatellet*; evidently taken completely by surprise, meanwhile, the forces of the allies rather remained inert, the one exception being the corps of General *Ziethen*: posted to watch the frontier, this hastily withdrew in the direction of the defensive position *Blücher* had previously selected for his army at *Ligny*. For the rest of the day, there was little combat, but by the evening it was clear that a major battle was set to take place in and around this last place, a *Ziethen* threatened by an ever-thickening line of French forces having now been joined by *Johann von Thielmann's III Corps*. With the nearest Anglo-Dutch troops still some distance away and the Prussians deployed in a position that was wide open to envelopment, it

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<sup>7</sup> There are some oddities with respect to organization worth noting, namely the representation of the four French Reserve Cavalry Corps by a single formation under the command of *Grouchy* and the addition to the Prussian order of battle of a fictional cavalry formation headed by *Gneisenau*. While it is possible to see the rationale for both decisions, it has to be said that they, on the one hand, penalize the French, while, on the other, increase the otherwise very weak hitting power of the Prussians. Given the advantages conferred on the French by their greater number of commanders, the result is good for play balance, but it is nonetheless poor history.

seemed that the emperor was on the brink of winning the sort of triumph on which his whole plan of campaign had been predicated, the only downside from his point of view being that, on the left flank, Ney had not taken the vital crossroads at Quatre Bras.<sup>8</sup>

Conscious, perhaps, that he needed to do something to redeem himself in the eyes of his imperial master, hardly had 16 June dawned than Ney got his men moving. However, if there had ever been any chance of him taking Quatre Bras without a fight, the moment was now passed, for, even as the troops under the marshal's command tramped northward along the Brussels highway, Wellington was feeding the forces hastening to confront the invaders from the north and west into a solid defensive position that covered the crossroads from attack, a position, indeed, that looked so imposing that the marshal made no move to launch an offensive against it for the rest of the day. At this point, however, ousting the Anglo-Dutch was not especially important, all that Ney had to do being to keep the British commander from marching to the assistance of the Prussians, these last now being under attack by the corps of Vandamme and Gérard. With Blücher's position desperately exposed, his troops of mediocre quality, and the Anglo-Dutch nowhere in sight, the result was a contest that could go only one way: by the time the day closed, then, the whole of the Prussian Army (minus Ziethen's corps, which had been destroyed in the fighting) was streaming away to the north.

If Napoléon spent the night of 16 June in a mood of great optimism and excitement, it was hardly surprising, while the next morning saw him eager to press home his advantage still further. With his forces now composed of three corps—those of Drouet, Reille, and Mouton—Ney was therefore ordered to move on Wellington at Quatre Bras, while the emperor struck a further blow at Blücher. Thus encouraged, the former duly attacked the Anglo-Dutch, and by the afternoon, now supported by the guard and Grouchy's Reserve Cavalry, he had succeeded in edging round the British commander's right

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<sup>8</sup> Not the least benefits of wargaming is the chance it offers to test out long-held assumptions such as, in this case, the idea that Ney could somehow have secured Quatre Bras by the evening of 15 June. However, the merest glance at the map is enough to show that anything of the sort was quite impossible, Ney's starting point of Marchienne-au-Pont being situated no fewer than 14 hexagons distant from his intended destination and his forces limited to a move of four a turn.

flank and not only eliminating Hill's corps but also threatening to cut the Army of the Netherlands in two, not even the timely arrival of Uxbridge's cavalry being enough to tip the balance against the French onrush. As for the Prussians, meanwhile, now facing Vandamme and Gérard alone, and in addition reinforced by the hitherto absent Bülow, they were able to disengage and form a new line stretching from Centinnes to Gembloux. The end of the day therefore found the allied cause in tatters, and the next day saw it come under still more pressure in that Napoléon struck at the Prince of Orange's corps. This last having been posted at Genappe to keep open Wellington's line of retreat, fight hard though they did all day, the Anglo-Dutch forces were now in real trouble and all the more so as there was no chance whatsoever of the Prussians being able to make the slightest move on their behalf. With all communications between the two firmly severed, Wellington therefore resolved to retire on Ostend and Blücher to head for the Rhine, leaving Napoléon free to march on Brussels. Victory, then, was his, but neither of his opponents had been destroyed, thereby greatly limiting the potential impact of his triumph on the international situation.

From the French point of view, then, the result delivered by Waterloo Campaign 1815 was considerably less encouraging than that delivered by Waterloo 20. As for the third of the operational games reviewed here, namely Operational Studies Group's Battles of the Hundred Days, the verdict was still worse again. To begin with the package, what this offers is truly 1815 in miniature with a map that measures just 11 inches by 8 and a length of just four game turns, each of these last being equivalent to 48 hours (somewhat oddly, the period covered is therefore not 15–18 June but rather 14–21 June; this being quite inexplicable, it is here assumed that it is the former that is in operation, a change that makes no difference to the run of play). Thanks to the restricted size of the map, meanwhile, the ground scale is extremely small, with each hexagon covering an area of ground that is 3.2 km across as opposed to the normal 1, though this tendency toward ever-greater abstraction is countered by the fact that the armies are represented in much greater detail, what the counters stand for being not corps but rather divisions (mercifully enough, given the relatively large number of counters that is the result, very few are ever placed on the board, the vast majority instead

spending their time on off-board charts that record their current strength; rather than being lost *en tout* at the mere throw of a single die, divisions are rather gradually whittled away until they reach breaking point). Finally, a key role in the game is played by the three commanders in chief and their various subordinates, it being the counters that represent these figures that are the only ones normally to appear on the map.

As can be imagined, so short is the game that, to have any chance of winning—something that requires them either to eliminate 40 Prussian or 35 Anglo-allied strength points or to exit the northern edge of the map in the direction of Brussels with a minimum of 20 strength points—the French have no option but to hurl themselves on the allies with all the energy and dispatch at their disposal. Sure enough, then, dawn on 15 June saw the Army of the North cross the frontier in strength, annihilate the Prussian division holding Charleroi, and push some way farther north, though not far enough to prevent Hendrik George de Perponcher's division from securing Quatre Bras and Blücher from concentrating two of his four corps—those of Ziethen and Thielmann—at Ligny. So far, so historical, but matters now took a dramatic turn in that 16 June saw Ney defeat a Wellington who had arrived posthaste from Brussels at Quatre Bras and inflict such heavy losses that the British commander had no option but to fall back in the direction of the Belgian capital. At Ligny, the Prussians put up a much stouter fight and for the most part held their ground, though Wellington's defeat meant, of course, that they had to break off the battle and seek safety in retreat. On the whole, then, Napoléon was doing well, but a shocking display of negligence and complacency on the part of Ney, Grouchy, Vandamme, and the commander of the guard, Antoine Drouot, alike led to the pursuit of the retiring allied forces being badly bungled, the result being that the successes that had been gained were not fully exploited.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the incompetence of his supporters, Napoléon was far from beaten, 17 June therefore seeing him heading up the Brussels highway in pursuit of Wellington with Drouot, Reille, Gérard, and Mouton, but on the right Vandamme, Drouot, and Grouchy all

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<sup>9</sup> This was not through oversight; rather, whether or not such actions as pursuits are carried out depends on a die throw on the part of the commanders concerned, the results of which were uniformly negative.

remained extremely sluggish, thereby enabling Blücher to reach Wavre, where he was eventually joined by Bülow, and Wellington to occupy Mont Saint-Jean. For all the emperor's efforts, then, the climactic battle to which everything had been leading was fought out in much the same way as it was in 1815. Thus, 18 June opened with the troops under Napoléon's command launching an all-out assault on the Anglo-Dutch positions, only for this to achieve no more than partial success and certainly not enough to break the Army of the Netherlands before the Prussians, who had been marched west in all due haste by Blücher, suddenly burst on the French right flank. Unable to resist the torrent that was suddenly unleashed on him, by midnight an utterly ruined Napoléon was back on the frontier at Charleroi. The allied pursuit had been checked at Quatre Bras by a gallant stand on the part of the remains of the corps of Mouton and Drouet together with the guard—Drouet, had evidently finally bestirred himself in the face of disaster—but heroic rear-guard actions are not the stuff of victory, the flight of the eagle therefore having been brought to a sudden end.

At the close of the game just described, at least Napoléon still had an army, enough formations still retaining sufficient cohesion for him at least to preserve his dignity. In the last example we examine in this chapter, even this consolation was to be denied him. The game in question here was Worthington's *Napoleon Returns, 1815*. As we saw in chapter 4, like *Napoleon: The Waterloo Campaign, 1815*, this was an act of homage to the very first board game to seek to reconstruct the campaign of the Hundred Days, namely Parker Brothers' venerable *Waterloo Campaign, 1815* (see chapter 1, footnote 14) in that it shunned a hexagon map in favor of one in which the dominant figures were cities, towns, and villages and the roads that linked them. To move, within the limits afforded by a set number of movement points, the pleasingly tactile wooden blocks, each of which represent a corps, that make up the rival armies simply travel from town to town at a rate of one (the usual march rate) or two (cavalry and infantry force-marching) a turn until they find that further progress is blocked by an enemy force. At this point, of course, battles take place, the results of which are settled by a "rock-paper-scissor"-like process whereby the players repeatedly match a series of action cards against one another, the number that they have available being determined

by the number of corps that they bring to the fray together with such corps as might be able to reach the field by marching to the sound of the guns. Sooner or later, one side or the other will either be defeated or voluntarily withdraw to fight another day, whereupon casualties—a set number of strength points determined by the number of rounds of combat—are marked off on a simple chart and the whole process begun all over again.

All this makes for a game that is very smooth-flowing, so much so, indeed, that it is probable that on most occasions a full campaign can actually be played in the space of the two hours claimed by the manufacturers. Meanwhile, that it is an interesting addition to any collection cannot be denied. That said, it is a package that is deeply flawed, the designers having fallen prey to the same temptation to pander to the same sensibilities and prejudices in respect of Napoléon that we have seen elsewhere. In brief, the French are massively privileged in respect of their opponents. In the first place, then, there is the question of movement points of which they not only start with more than the Prussians and the Anglo-Dutch, but also have a much better chance of picking up the additional ones needed to get a real edge over the opposition; in the second, the superiority afforded Napoléon in terms of his powers of command, fly though this does in the face of the clear evidence that command and control in the ranks of the Army of the North was extremely weak; and, in the third, the much greater combat value in relation to their numbers accorded French troops, the assumption clearly being that such was the excellence of Napoléon's men that the military power available to the emperor was only slightly less than that available to his two opponents.<sup>10</sup>

Weight the dice though games designers might, however, their efforts are by no means necessarily enough to change history. Far from it, the outing of Napoleon Returns, 1815, featured here, rather run-

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<sup>10</sup> This weighting occurs in two different ways. In the campaign of 1815, 124,000 French troops faced some 230,000 British, Dutch, Germans, and Prussians, this being a ratio of roughly 5:9, yet, in the game, at full strength the Army of the North has 60 strength points and access to 21 combat cards, whereas the same totals for the Army of the Netherlands and the Army of the Lower Rhine are but 78 and 24, respectively. In purely numerical terms, then, the superiority of the allies has been slashed by around three-quarters, while the combat performance of neither the forces of Wellington nor those of Blücher suggests that the slight edge that is all they have been given is distinctly ungenerous.

ning entirely true to form. Thus, having marched across the frontier at Charleroi, Napoléon duly set about the Prussian forces massing to meet him at Ligny and inflicted a heavy defeat on Blücher, the latter then falling back northward in considerable disarray. Possibly rather unwisely, Wellington, who had been assembling his troops at Quatre Bras, elected to stand and fight rather than falling back on Waterloo straight away, only to be sent reeling back in the direction of Brussels in his turn. With Wellington at Waterloo and Blücher at Wavre, the stage was set for the climactic battle, and climactic this proved to be. Thus, no sooner had the day dawned than the French were assaulting the slopes of Mont Saint-Jean, but the Anglo-Dutch put up a staunch defence, while Blücher hastened to support Wellington so quickly that the first of his men arrived on the field much earlier than was the case historically. If the Army of the North had suffered heavily, it was not yet out of the fight and a counterattack by its opponents was checked in its turn. Clearly, it was the moment of decision, for at this point Napoléon could very easily have pulled his men out and headed for the safety of the French frontier. To do this, however, would be to concede strategic defeat, and so the emperor rather threw his forces into one last desperate attack, only to discover that he had miscalculated, his long-suffering men taking such losses that the day was deemed to have ended with the whole of the Army of the North disintegrating in rout.

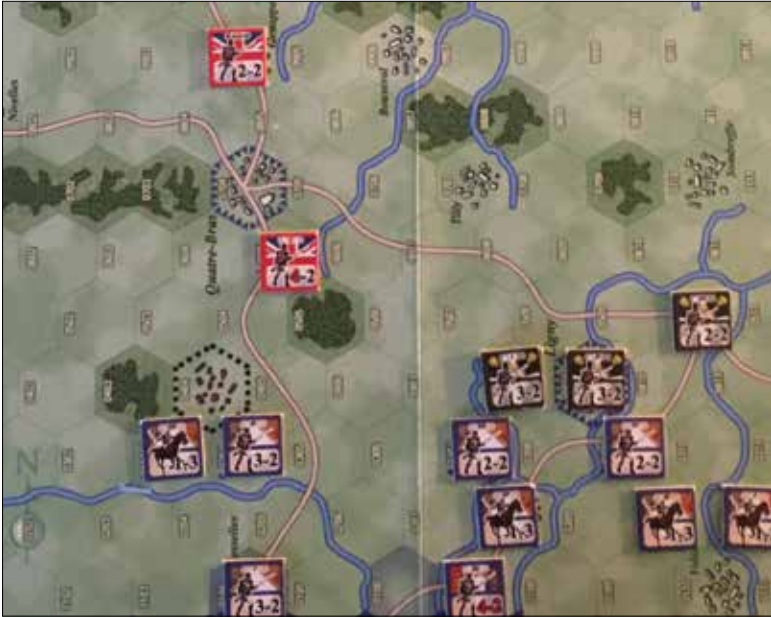
To conclude, then, the operational-level game is the one most likely to win the campaign of the Hundred Days for Napoléon, but, even when the emperor is spared the cloudburst that so hampered the movement of his armies on the night of 17 June 1815—an event for which *Battles of the Hundred Days* curiously makes no provision at all and *Napoleon Returns* but little—victory is far from guaranteed, while any structural moves to replicate the chaos that reigned in the command elements of the Army of the North is likely to render his task still more difficult (it was, of course, the failure of many of his subordinates to show much in the way of energy or even basic competence that led to the defeat of the French in the above outing of *Battles of the Hundred Days*: not only did neither Grouchy nor Vandamme advance beyond Ligny, but the former's corps did not fire a single shot). Ignore history altogether, of course, and Napoléon has a good chance of marching to glory, and all the more so if steps are



## *Chapter 6*

taken to reduce the odds at which he was operating, but to do so is to shun historical simulation in favor of mere flights of fancy. Meanwhile, enter Brussels though he might, the French ruler would still almost certainly have a war to fight, and we must now turn our attention to attempts to examine this war by means of the board wargame.

## Historical Hexagons (2)



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo 20, the situation at 1200 in the afternoon on 16 June.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo 20, the situation at nightfall on 16 June. Although Wellington is standing firm at Quatre Bras, Blücher has been badly beaten at Ligny.

## Chapter 6



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo 20, the situation at nightfall on 17 June. After a harassing day, Wellington has reached safety at Mont Saint-Jean, while the Prussians are gathering at Wavre.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo 20, the situation at dusk on 18 June. Blücher's advance having been brought to a halt, the defense of Mont Saint-Jean collapses in the face of the unremitting French pressure.

*Historical Hexagons (2)*



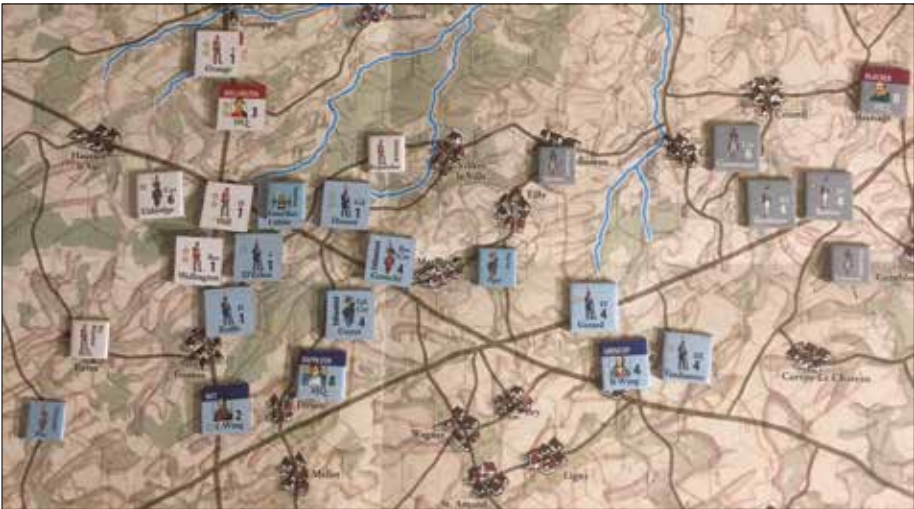
*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Waterloo Campaign 1815, the morning of 15 June.

## Chapter 6



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Waterloo Campaign 1815, the evening of 16 June. Blücher has been beaten at Ligny, but Wellington is standing firm at Quatre Bras.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Waterloo Campaign 1815, 1200 in the afternoon on 17 June. Napoléon presses his advantage against Blücher, while Ney takes on Wellington.

*Historical Hexagons (2)*



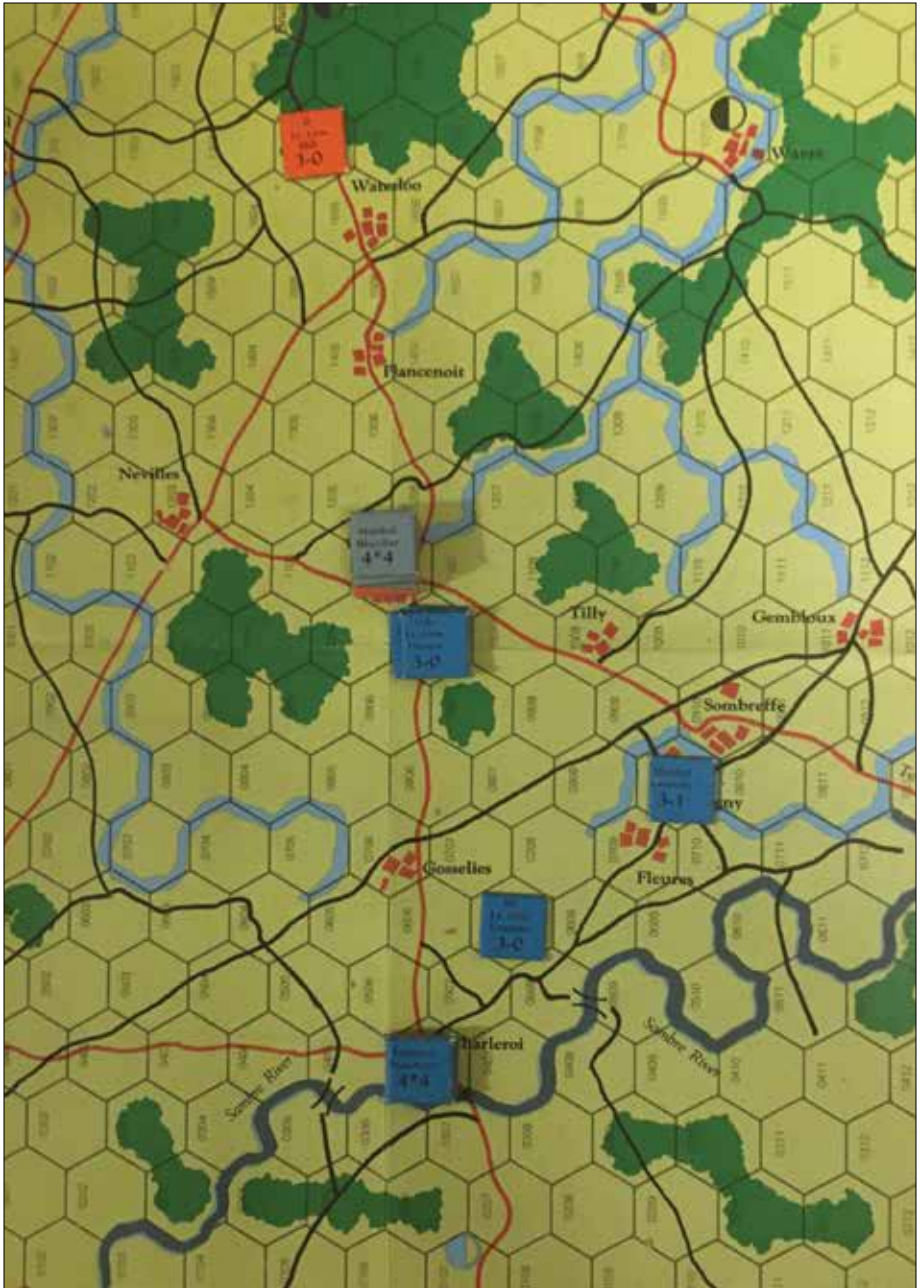
*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Waterloo Campaign 1815, 1200 in the afternoon on 18 June. Napoléon triumphant; Wellington and Blücher having been driven apart, the road to Brussels is open.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Battles of the Hundred Days, the situation at nightfall on 15 June.

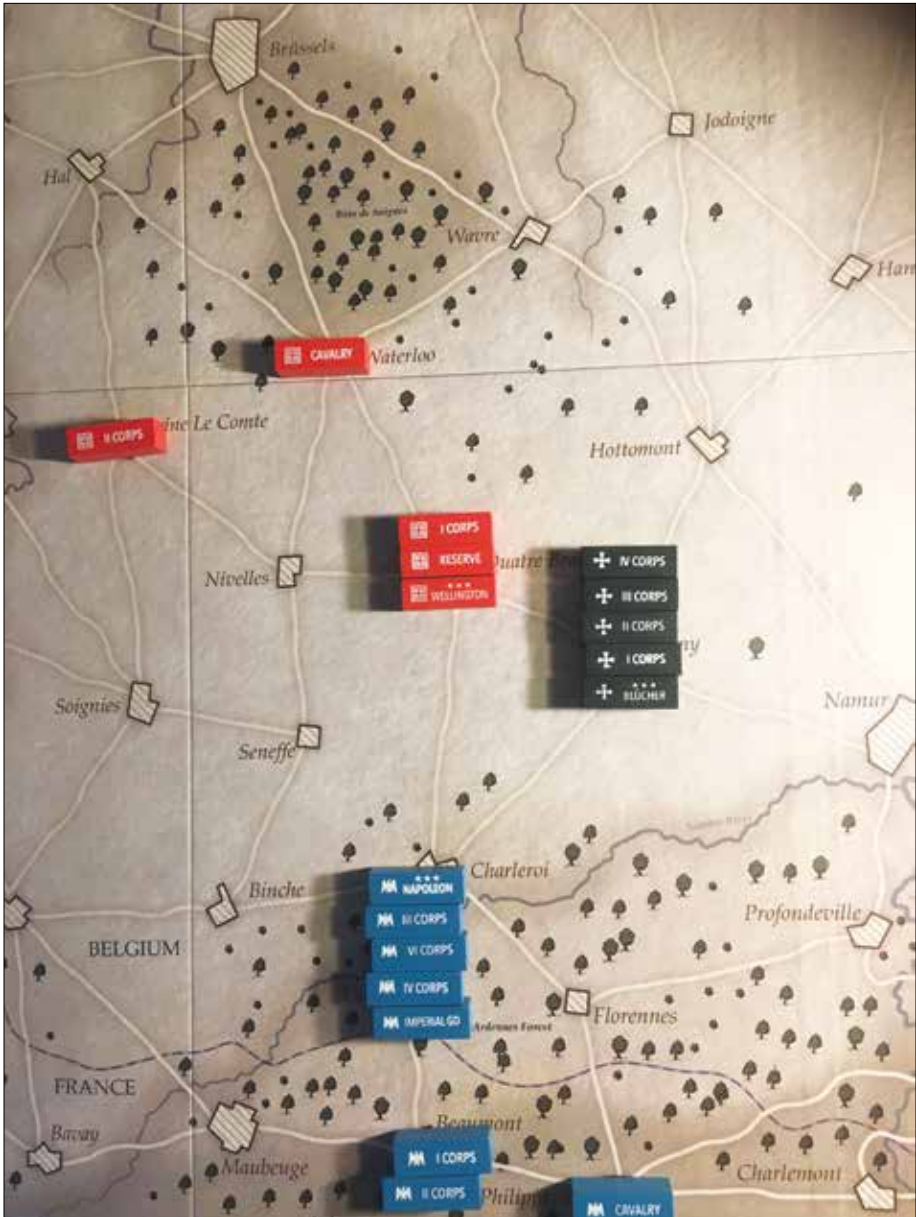
*Historical Hexagons (2)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
Battles of the Hundred Days, the situation at nightfall on 16 June.

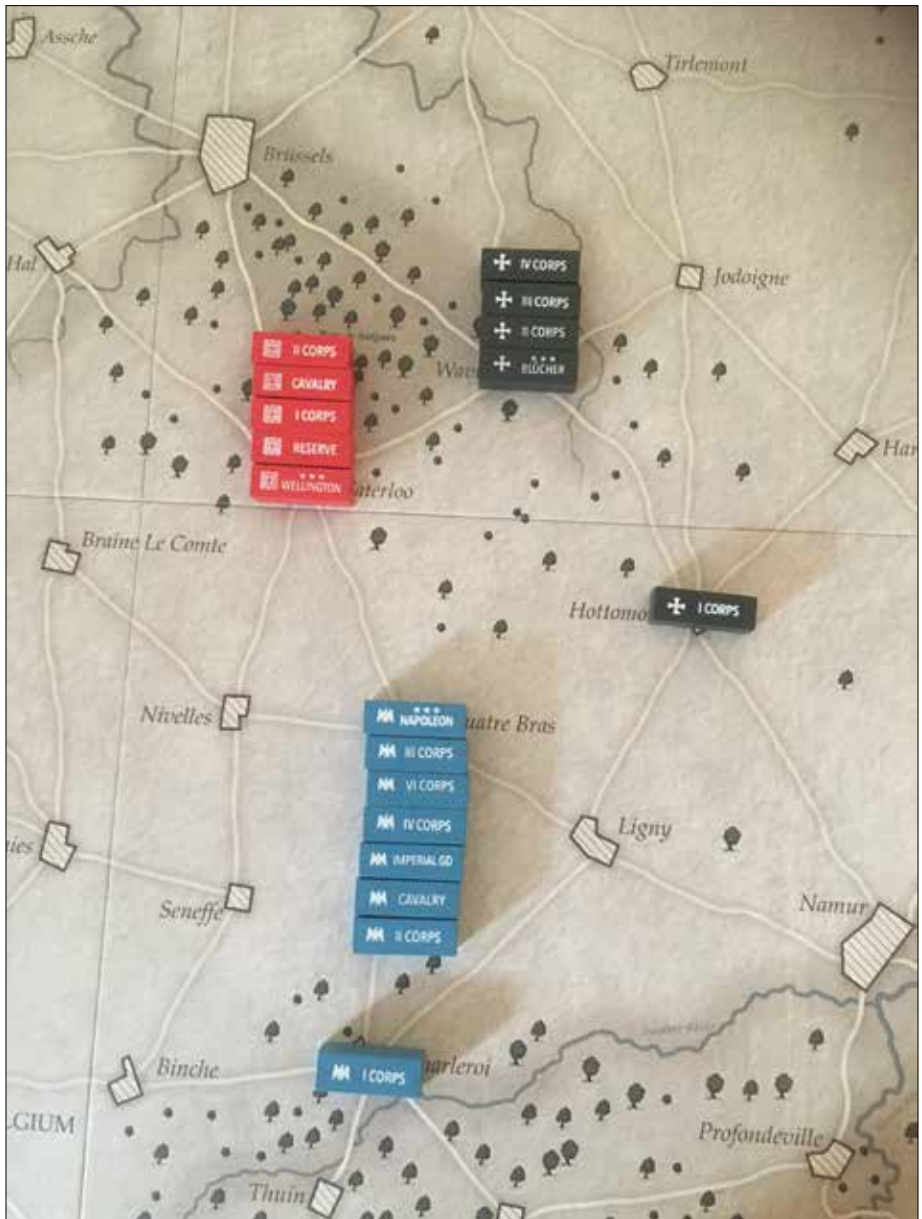


Chapter 6



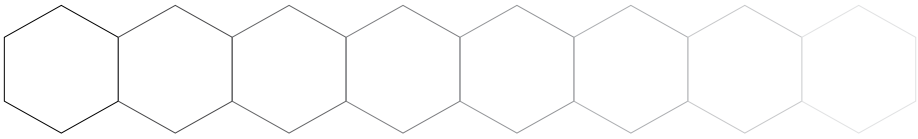
Author's collection, adapted by MCUP  
Napoleon Returns, the French Army of the North crosses the Meuse.

*Historical Hexagons (2)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon Returns, disaster looms for the emperor.



## *Chapter 7* Historical Hexagons (3)

### *Strategy*

Having discussed the tactical and operational levels of warfare, we can now turn to the strategic, namely the deployment and manipulation of military resources at theater level. The starting point here, of course, is to imagine that while Napoléon managed to win the sort of marginal victory at Waterloo we have been discussing, the coalition stayed rock solid and resolved on his overthrow.<sup>1</sup> We now need to assess the military situation that the emperor would have faced in this eventuality. In brief, what would have been the issues and challenges that he would have had to confront, and what, too, would have been the chances of Napoléon, his subordinate commanders, and the reborn Napoleonic army overcoming those issues and challenges? As we have seen, it is the opinion of many, if not most, military historians that all three would have been found wanting—that defeat, in effect, was inevitable—but it is important nothing is left to assertion. In this chapter, then, we shall first subject the military context of a French victory at Waterloo to a detailed analysis. As will become clear, however, this will not be some exercise in fantasy. Whereas in the very narrow context of the late afternoon of 18 June 1815 it is possible to come up with a very clear sequence of events that might well have produced a victory for the French, thereafter the range of possibilities open out once more, rendering it impossible to do more than hazard a guess as to how things might have worked out. That said, even if some of them are not entirely absolute, we do have a series

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<sup>1</sup> That this would have been the most likely result of even a considerable French victory is near incontestable. For an extended discussion, see Charles J. Esdaile, *Napoleon, France and Waterloo: The Eagle Rejected* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2017), 24–53.

of givens that allow us to come up with a raft of conclusions that are, once again, less than favorable to Napoléon and can at the same time be tested out by employing a suitable historical simulation.

So much for the basic thrust of this chapter. Before we move on to the discussion of commanders and commanded, however, we should first return to the very different 19 June 1815 that would have succeeded a breakthrough on the part of the Middle and Old Guard toward the end of the day, to reiterate the most likely way Napoléon might have secured some sort of success. In the course of the night, we can assume that both the Anglo-Dutch forces and the Prussians would have fallen back, with the former heading for Antwerp and the latter heading for the Rhine. For the former, in particular, this would not have been an easy process given the fact that the road from Brussels to Antwerp would also have been clogged with large numbers of terrified civilians in the form of well-connected onlookers such as Thomas Creevey and the Duke and Duchess of Richmond and the many wives, children, servants, and other hangers-on who had followed Wellington's soldiers to Brussels. Particularly among the Dutch, Belgian, and German units, desertion would have been heavy (the facts that, first, many men of these nationalities were long gone from the field even before the French finally prevailed, and that, second, at least 8,000 Prussian soldiers deserted the night after the Battle of Ligny, mean this can be said without fear of accusations of national bias). Caught in a country that had overnight suddenly become potentially hostile, British units would not have been hit by this scourge nearly as badly, but even so, exhaustion, the need to find food, and the propensity to drunkenness that was the redcoats' besetting sin meant that straggling could not but have been a serious issue. However, given that the French Army would have been too exhausted and disorganized to pursue Wellington's battered forces even had it not lost the bulk of its cavalry in the futile attacks of the afternoon, we may assume that the Anglo-Dutch force would have made it to safety, albeit at the cost of a proportion of its baggage, perhaps half its guns, all of its wounded (other, that is, than a few senior officers), and as many as 20,000 deserters and stragglers, of whom large numbers of the latter would have quickly been taken prisoner; aside from anything else, Napoléon would have been further delayed by the need to stage a triumphal entry into Brussels, receive the sur-

render of the city authorities, and issue the decrees announcing the restoration of Belgium to the frontiers of France.

What, then, would have been the situation in military terms? Safe behind the defenses of Antwerp would have been perhaps as many as 55,000 Anglo-Dutch troops (in the absence of an effective French pursuit, it may be assumed that the 17,000 men who had sat out the battle watching Wellington's right flank at Halle would have joined the duke at Brussels and very possibly been allotted the task of rear-guard). Given the enormous losses—as many as 30,000 men—that this implies, such a picture is hardly one to inspire much in the way of confidence, yet it should be remembered that the men who stuck it out and reached Antwerp would have contained a high proportion of disciplined veterans of a sort that was unlikely to be fazed even by the worst privations: still relatively intact were most of the old Peninsular battalions, including Maitland's 1st Brigade of Foot Guards, Adam's Light Brigade, and Pack's Highlanders. That said, this was an army whose commander in chief was dangerously wounded, whose general staff had been all but wiped out, and which had lost a proportionate number of corps, divisional, and brigade commanders. In short, it was a force that was in desperate need of rest and reorganization and one that would not be able to fight offensively for some little time.

Insofar as the Army of the Netherlands was concerned, then, Napoléon would have won himself a breathing space. Yet, even so it should be recognized that there were limits to his success. Secure in Antwerp, Wellington could have received unlimited supplies and reinforcements from the sea, while, with the remainder of the troops who had been fighting in the War of 1812 now coming home in large numbers, there was no shortage of men to send him. At the same time, however battered it may have been, the force that had stood its ground at Waterloo remained very much an army in being, not least because its British component, at least, was spoiling for a fight: given the spot at which the final French attack had hit Wellington's line, not least because we may assume that a compelling narrative would have emerged of British heroism being let down by Belgian, Dutch, and German cowardice. If the British were eager for a resumption of the fight, so too were plenty of their allies: the haughty attitude of the redcoats having caused much resentment, there were many officers of the Dutch Army in particular who were anxious for

an opportunity to vindicate themselves. Prince Bernhard Carl of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, for example, was the commander of the Regiment of Orange-Nassau, and, as such, had fought very well at both Quatre Bras and Waterloo. Writing in 1841 to Dutch officer Captain Ernst van Löben Sels, who was collecting material for a Siborne-style account of the campaign, he expresses a bitterness that would have doubtless been still more acute had the French won the day.

Of course, my dear captain, you may have noticed that the officers in our army who served in the campaign of 1815 do not like to discuss it, and, when they can no longer avoid this conversation, they do so with a bitter feeling in memory of the wrong and half measures that preceded the outbreak of hostilities, the confusion which characterized the operations and the lack of care and well-being afforded our army. . . . In addition, [there is] the very little due recognition the Duke of Wellington rendered in official reports about our army during the campaign [and] the brutality that he . . . used in his relations with our chiefs in accusing them of not knowing how to make their troops march, but without actually having taken care of assuring [their] subsistence. . . . Here, my dear captain, are some of the reasons why the memory of this campaign leaves us as cold as a review of the camp at Bayen.<sup>2</sup>

At some point, then, the Army of the Netherlands was likely to take the field again. Ideally, of course, Napoléon would have loved to subject it to a knock-out blow, but this was simply not within his grasp; not for nothing did he imply at Saint Helena that a British retreat to Antwerp was his worst fear. In brief, Antwerp was a formidable fortress that had taken the Spaniards a year to take in the siege of 1584–85 and had defied the allies for three months in 1814, having only surrendered when it received news of the fall of Napoléon. Situated on the outside or eastern bank of a great bend in the river Scheldt, it was protected by a double line of bastions, which enclosed

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<sup>2</sup> C. B. von Sachsen-Weimar to E. van Löben Sels, 29 August 1841, as quoted in John Franklin, ed., *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence* (Ulverston, Cumbria: 1815 Limited, 2010), 77. The reference to the camp at Bayen is a mystery, alas.

not just the city but also its capacious docks, and dominated by a massive citadel, while several detached forts commanded the river approaches from north and south alike. With all the resources to draw from of the considerable fleet built there by Napoléon in the past 15 years, it was also bristling with guns, while Wellington had ordered the construction of a number of outworks designed to strengthen the defenses still further, the works involved being so significant as to give employment to no fewer than 20,000 laborers. All too clearly, even to think of taking the city was out of the question: to do so by storm would have led to heavy casualties, while the fact that Napoléon did not have a battering train with him meant that it would be many weeks before formal siege operations could even be embarked on, these being many weeks, of course, that Napoléon did not have at his disposal. All this placed the emperor in a most uncomfortable position. He could not take Antwerp and was under great pressure to march in pursuit of the Prussians to maintain the momentum of the campaign, and yet to ignore Antwerp would have been to invite a reinvigorated Army of the Netherlands to retake Brussels and thereby, at the very least, cause him considerable political embarrassment. What was needed, then, was to detach a force to mask the defenders, but so large was the garrison and so extensive the perimeter that the number of troops that would be needed for such a project could not have been less than 60,000 men, this being a force so great that it would have left Napoléon with insufficient men to carry the war to the enemy elsewhere. And even were Antwerp to be blocked up in this fashion, there was still the problem of British control of the sea; what could be done, for example, to prevent Uxbridge from sending out amphibious expeditions to raid the coasts of northern France or even conduct significant forays into the interior?<sup>3</sup>

What we see, then, is an exact replay of the situation that had been created in Andalucía in 1810. Having overrun Andalucía in a great *blitzkrieg*-style offensive, Marshal Jean-de-Dieu Soult had found himself balked by the island city of Cádiz. Unable to storm the city, he had been forced to leave one-third of his 60,000 troops to blockade it, thereby effectively neutralizing his forces for most of the

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<sup>3</sup> For details of the siege of Antwerp in 1584–85, see Christopher Duffy, *Siege Warfare: The Fortress in the Early-Modern World, 1494–1660* (London: Routledge, 1979), 76–80.

next two-and-one-half years; while columns could be put together for action elsewhere, usually in successive attempts to either take or, later, relieve, the fortress of Badajoz, it was only at the cost of stripping his dominions of their garrisons and leaving them vulnerable to allied forces operating in the interior or dispatched from Cádiz by sea.<sup>4</sup> How Napoléon would have dealt with the problem of Antwerp, we cannot know, though it may be assumed that, taking advantage of the Army of the Netherlands' need to rebuild its strength, he would have left the garrison to its own devices and marched on the Rhine in the hope of obtaining a victory over the Prussians. And would even victory against the Prussians have been forthcoming? In the wake of our new-model Waterloo, the allies would in all probability have reverted to the so-called Trachenberg Plan, the scheme agreed in 1813 that laid down that commanders facing Napoléon should pull back, secure in the knowledge that other forces would move in against his line of communications and force him to retreat. With Blücher's intemperance curtailed by the rough handling that his troops had endured at Ligny and the French badly short of cavalry, the result, one can presume, is that Napoléon would have been drawn ever deeper into northern Germany, leaving the armies of Austria, Russia, and the south German states free to strike across the Rhine.<sup>5</sup>

Repeatedly, then, one is brought back to the simple fact that Napoléon did not have enough troops for the task in hand. This being the case, we now need to consider the issue of France's mobilization in 1815 in more detail. When Napoléon returned to France in 1814, he was certainly greeted with acclaim by certain elements of the populace, but even he was not so self-deluded as to believe that he could place much faith in this phenomenon. Enthusiastic though it was, the army numbered only 175,000 men, this being a total that clearly had to be expanded in short order. To do this, the obvious way forward was to order a fresh levy of conscripts, and yet in the first in-

<sup>4</sup> For the strategic situation that pertained in respect of Cádiz in the wake of the fall of Andalucía in 1810, see Charles J. Esdaile, *Outpost of Empire: The Napoleonic Occupation of Andalucía, 1810–1812* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 338–98.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the Trachenberg Plan, see J. P. Riley, *Napoleon and the World War of 1813: Lessons in Coalition Warfighting* (London: Routledge, 2000), 118–20. That it was very likely that the same scheme would be followed once again is suggested by the fact that its progenitor, Karl Philipp, prince zu Schwarzenberg's chief of staff, Josef Radetzky, continued to serve in the same capacity in 1815.



stance this was ruled out as being politically dangerous. As Henri Houssaye writes, “Having just resumed the crown, [Napoléon] hesitated to resort to such an unpopular measure as the reestablishment of conscription, which Louis XVIII had recently abolished.”<sup>6</sup> All that was done, in consequence, was to recall the 33,000 men who were currently on leave or had been demobilized in 1814, and to issue an amnesty for the significantly larger number—some 85,000—who were on the books as having deserted or, at least, gone absent without leave. The results, however, were disappointing, for, as even Houssaye, a staunch Bonapartist, is forced to admit, there was much resistance.

Public opinion was so hostile to the idea of war that even amongst . . . former soldiers of Napoleon, numbers responded to the call merely to urge reasons for their exemption or disqualification. . . . Though a great number of these men had deserted in 1814 to avoid wearing the white cockade, a greater number had left the ranks through sheer weariness of war. During the last year they had resumed their labours in the field and workshop; many of them had married, and these were all the less disposed to serve. In the departments where Royalist tendencies prevailed, the recalled men, feeling sure of public sympathy, behaved in a most disorderly way at the recruiting stations. They shouted, “We will not go! Long live the King!”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Henry [*sic*] Houssaye, 1815: *Waterloo*, trans. by Arthur Emile Mann (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1900), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Houssaye, 1815: *Waterloo*, 4–5. Also worth quoting is Hobhouse: “There is . . . in the army such a spirit of independence, and so weary are the superior officers of the perpetual labours of the last war, so anxious are the new men to assure what they have obtained, that no-one here thinks that, under any supposition, Napoleon would be able to persuade . . . his troops . . . to carry a war beyond the Rhine.” John Cam Hobhouse, *The Substance of Some Letters, Written by an Englishman Resident at Paris during the Last Reign of the Emperor Napoleon*, vol. 1 (London: for Ridgways by T. Davison, 1816), 205, hereafter *Letters Written by an Englishman*, vol. 1. For an example of war weariness among Napoléon’s veterans, see Archibald Alison, *Travels in France during the Years 1814–15, Comprising a Residence at Paris during the Stay of the Allied Armies and at Aix at the Period of the Landing of Bonaparte*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, UK: Macredie, Skelly, and Muckersy, 1816), 7: “At the inns, the valets and ostlers were for the most part old soldiers who had marched under Napoleon; they seemed happy, or at least always expressed themselves happy, at being allowed to return to their homes: one

To the recalled soldiers—some 46,000—were added a number of new recruits; a maximum might be 15,000 volunteers.<sup>8</sup> An extra 25,000 men were secured through an appeal to the 94,000 veterans who had been discharged from the service prior to 1814, though the men concerned were for the most part too unfit to serve in anything other than special garrison units.<sup>9</sup> However, these efforts were insufficient to meet the army's needs, and so recourse was once again had to mobilizing the National Guard. The response to the decrees concerned, however, was most revealing. In much of the north and the east—areas characterized by long traditions of military service that had coincidentally also had to run the gauntlet of the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians during the invasion of 1814—the men concerned for the most part came forward cheerfully enough, but elsewhere the picture was very different, Orne raising just 107 of the 2,160 men it was supposed to provide, Pas de Calais 437 out of 7,440, and Gers 90 out of 1,440. By the time that the campaign began, then, only something more than three-fifths of the total strength of 238,000 had reported for duty.<sup>10</sup> For all the cheerful language employed by the officers who inspected them, whether they would do their duty was therefore

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of them was particularly eloquent in describing the horrors of the last few months; he concluded by saying, 'that had things gone on in this way for a few months longer, Napoleon must have made the women march.'

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted here that several hundred of these volunteers were not French, but rather the flotsam and jetsam of some of the many foreign contingents that had still been fighting for Napoléon in 1814, and also that they included a battalion recruited from erstwhile slaves who had gravitated to the port of Bayonne. Also interesting, meanwhile, is the fact that Napoléon was forced to curtail the activities of the recruiting parties sent to bring in men on the grounds that their activities might antagonize the public and even provoke disorder. Houssaye, *1815: Waterloo*, 5. Meanwhile, Schom places the number at not 15,000 but rather just 6,000. See Alan Schom, *One Hundred Days: Napoleon's Road to Waterloo* (London: Penguin, 1993), 200.

<sup>9</sup> Houssaye, *1815: Waterloo*, 9. According to Houssaye, the response among the veterans was overwhelming, the vast majority of the men concerned rushing to offer themselves for service.

<sup>10</sup> Houssaye, *1815: Waterloo*, 7–8. According to Schom, the number was even smaller, a mere 90,000 in fact. See Schom, *One Hundred Days*, 200. It need hardly be said that admirers of Napoléon take a different view: "In communes which furnished only eight to the conscription (Malmaison, for instance), sixty have marched, and in a neighbouring commune forty have gone instead of the former five. Three of the gardeners of the imperial chateau of Malmaison . . . marched at an hour's warning. No reluctance is manifested in the recruits: if there were any, these means of recruiting an army would be impracticable." Hobhouse, *Letters Written by an Englishman*, vol. 1, 213.

open to question. Ardent supporter of the return of Napoléon though he was, even John Cam Hobhouse could not quite hide the issue in his account of a great review of the Paris National Guard that he witnessed shortly after his arrival in the capital. Presumably because they came from Jacobin-inclined districts where the regime was particularly popular, some units “shouted loud and long and raised their caps on their bayonets,” but, in general, “all of them shopkeepers . . . who have been great gainers by the short peace,” the men considered Napoléon’s reappearance as “the signal of war.” Had the situation been otherwise, Hobhouse continued, things might have been different, “for they all cling to his palaces, his walks, his galleries, his columns, his triumphal arches, his bridges, [his] fountains and [his] quays, and all the imperial embellishments of the capital: and, also, they all lament, where they do not hate, the imprudence of the royal family and the advisers of the king.” However, the situation was not otherwise, and the bulk of the troops “did not, therefore, hail him universally nor very loudly.”<sup>11</sup>

Whatever doubts may be thrown up by the behavior of the National Guard, Napoléon certainly had enough men to mount an initial strike. As the emperor recognized, however, provision had to be made for an uncertain future, and this in turn meant creating a reserve and with it resort to conscription. Put before the Conseil d’État (Council of State) on 23 May, a proposal to mobilize the class of 1815 (calculated at 120,000 men) was rejected on the pretext that all matters pertaining to conscription came within the purview of the legislative, but Napoléon got around this by the entirely specious argument that the class of 1815 had already been mobilized in 1814, the net result being that there was no need formally to mobilize them as such, it rather being possible simply to recall the so-called *marie-louises* from the homes to which they had been dismissed at the close

<sup>11</sup> Hobhouse, *Letters Written by an Englishman*, vol. 1, 41–42. It is particularly worthy of note here that, although the matter is dressed up with talk of providing it with elite companies of grenadiers and voltigeurs, no fewer than 25,000 regular troops had to be diverted to the National Guard to stiffen its battalions even to the extent that they could be relied on for garrison duty. If this is so, the inference can only be that Napoléon regarded the National Guard as being militarily useless, and, very probably, politically unreliable. See Maximien Lamarque, *Mémoires et souvenirs du Général Maximien Lamarque*, vol. 1 (Paris: H. Fournier Jeune, Libraire, 1835), 71, hereafter *Mémoires et souvenirs*.

of the campaign of 1814. Yet, such subterfuges should deceive no one: with the return of the emperor, it was clear that conscription could not but loom large on the horizon, and all the more so because even victory was desperately dearly bought: at Ligny and Quatre Bras, the Army of the North suffered some 16,000 casualties, and it may be inferred that a subsequent triumph over Wellington would have cost at least 10,000 more, the combined total being a figure that is only just short of 20 percent of its strength. Infected with the magic of Napoléon, in the event, many of the men mobilized from the class of 1815 turned out willingly enough—by the time that the campaign began, some 50,000 men had reported for service, in fact—but, again, one has to ask what the response was likely to be once the call-up had been extended to fresh age groups, the likely answer to this question being revealed all too clearly by the maneuvering indulged in its respect by the emperor and Council of State alike.<sup>12</sup> To quote Gareth Glover, “Perhaps the greatest myth of the entire Waterloo campaign is that France wholeheartedly followed the great man into war; the truth was far from it.”<sup>13</sup>

Hidden away among all this are several other issues. In the first place, reference has already been made to the fact that the army was very much a finite resource in that replacements and reinforcements alike would only be available at the cost of measures that, as we shall see, were likely to increase Napoléon’s problems on the home front. But it was not just a matter of men. France’s arsenals had been sufficiently well provided to ensure that the extra men who had reported for duty or volunteered for service had received the correct arms and equipment (though at least one of the famed regiments of cuirassiers rode to war without a single one of the sets of breast- and backplates from which the units concerned derived their name). However, clothing them was a different matter, many units going to the front dressed in little more than greatcoats and forage caps.<sup>14</sup> Even more

<sup>12</sup> Houssaye, *1815: Waterloo*, 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: Myth and Reality* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2014), 14.

<sup>14</sup> According to Elting, a Prussian cavalry unit got a nasty shock at Ligny when it charged a ragged-looking battalion that it assumed to be a National Guard battalion only to discover that it was a veteran formation of the Middle Guard. See John R. Elting, *Swords around a Throne: Napoleon’s Grande Armée* (London: Free Press, 1988), 651. The most complete guide to the uniforms worn in the Waterloo campaign is constituted by Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *Uniforms of Waterloo in Colour* (Poole, UK: Blandford Press,

problematic was the issue of horses: everyone agrees that the French cavalry at Waterloo was well-mounted, but what is recognized less often is that this was only achieved at the cost of virtually stripping France of horseflesh. In short, getting the Army of the North into the field was achieved by dint of scraping the bottom of the barrel, and this in turn begs the question of how the fresh troops needed to reinforce the army in the event of a prolonged campaign could have been equipped even had it been possible to levy them in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

Also at issue is the psychological ability of the army to withstand the pressures of a long war. Conventionally, the performance of the French Army in 1815 is represented in the most laudatory of terms: the vast majority of them veterans of several campaigns, the soldiers are supposed to have hurled themselves on the Anglo-Dutch Army with the utmost gallantry and later to have resisted the advance of the Prussians quite literally to the death; deeply angered by the return of the Bourbons, they wanted revenge for the humiliations of the past year. Of their spirit, no better testimony can be found than the scenes that were witnessed by British officers in Brussels at the close of the campaign.

The French wounded are almost all quartered in the city hospitals, or in those houses whose owners may have shown a lukewarmness in the present contest. Their constant cry was, and still is, "Vive l'empereur!" Some of them brought in from the field the other day, extremely weak from loss of blood and want of food . . . vented the same exclamation. Louis XVIII sent an officer the other day to inquire if they were in want of anything and to afford assistance to those who required it.

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1974). Meanwhile, such was the degree to which the army was unprepared for war in 1815 that it has to be recognized that taking the field as early as the middle of June was by no means the least achievement of Napoléon's career. As Drouet remarked in his memoirs, "It would be difficult to describe the activity that one saw on all sides and in every branch of the service." J. B. Drouet, *Le maréchal Drouet, compte d'Erlon: vie militaire, écrit par lui-même et dédié à ses amis* (Paris: Gustave Barba, 1844), 94.

<sup>15</sup> The strongly pro-Napoleonic Lamarque claims that by the time that the campaign began, no fewer than 10 manufactories employing 6,000 workers had been set up in Paris alone for the repair and fabrication of muskets, and that the end of the year would have seen production reach at least 300,000, but whether such figures could have been sustained without a restoration of the measures employed by Carnot in 1793 is a moot point. See Lamarque, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 1, 40.

He visited every one of the hospitals, but I believe he could not prevail on one to accept of assistance from him in the name of his sovereign. They had no king but one.<sup>16</sup>

As might be expected, Hobhouse also waxed lyrical on the spirit evinced by Napoléon's army. To quote his description of a review he witnessed in Paris in late May, "Both on the present occasion and at other reviews I have remarked an enthusiasm, an affection, a delight apparent in the countenances of the troops at the sight of their general which no parent can command in the midst of their family."<sup>17</sup> And, finally, a Frenchman who remarked on the enthusiasm of the soldiery was Lucien Bonaparte, the latter commenting how the wounded who made it back to Paris in the wake of the French defeat filled the air with shouts of "Long live the emperor!" "Our emperor has been betrayed!," "Arms! Give us arms!," and even "I still have one arm with which to serve the emperor!"<sup>18</sup> To the very end, indeed, elements of the army wanted to fight on: in the course of Napoléon's flight to the sea in the wake of his second abdication, he was pressed by troops stationed in one of the towns he passed through to take the field again at the head of the army fighting the Vendéen rebels (see below).<sup>19</sup> Yet, all was not quite as rosy as this might suggest. In the words of David Chandler, "Indeed, it can be argued with considerable justice that Napoleon miscalculated the calibre of his army, regarding its quality with . . . misplaced optimism."<sup>20</sup> If the lower ranks were enthusiastic, their superiors were frequently gloomy and pessimistic, and in some cases downright disloyal. Insofar as this last subject is concerned, we might cite the commander of the 14th Divi-

<sup>16</sup> S. Monick, ed., *The Iberian and Waterloo Campaigns: The Letters of Lt James Hope, (92nd (Highland) Regiment), 1811-1815* (Heathfield, UK: Naval and Military Press, 2000), 272. See also LtCol J. Leach, *Rough Sketches in the Life of an Old Soldier* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1831), 393-94: "Fighting under the eye of Napoleon, and feeling what a great and important stake they contested for, will account for their extraordinary perseverance and valour, and for the vast efforts which they made for victory."

<sup>17</sup> Hobhouse, *Letters Written by an Englishman*, vol. 1, 395.

<sup>18</sup> See Lucien Bonaparte, *La vérité sur les cent-jours* (Paris: Chez Ladvoat, 1835), 36.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Thiry, *Les débuts de la seconde restauration* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1947), 121.

<sup>20</sup> David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon: The Mind and Methods of History's Greatest Soldier* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 1023.

sion, General Louis-Auguste-Victor Bourmont, who fled to the Prussians with all his staff on the eve of the Battle of Ligny, and, second, the unknown officer who galloped into Wellington's lines at Waterloo with news of the impending attack of the Imperial Guard. Such cases, perhaps, were very much in the minority, but there is no doubt that they had a considerable impact. This made, as has often been observed, the army that marched across the Belgian frontier in 1815 a very brittle force. With the rank and file utterly devoted to Napoléon and deeply suspicious of their generals as men who had almost to the very last man rallied to Louis XVIII, the least reverse was likely to lead to shouts of treason, even downright panic. As Andrew Uffindell has written, then, "The French soldier was a dangerous weapon. He was capable of magnificent feats of arms, but also of failing his commander *in extremis*."<sup>21</sup>

Such, at least, is the conventional explanation of the spirit of the French Army in 1815. However, given that it is an argument originally taken from Houssaye, much more research is needed here. In particular, to try to explain the issue of the sudden collapse of the army in the final moments of the Battle of Waterloo in terms of self-fulfilling fears of treason looks nothing short of disingenuous. In 1814, huge numbers of French soldiers had deserted, while, as we shall see, British sources frequently report that the soldiers who had fought Wellington at Bayonne, Orthez, and Toulouse had been unanimous in welcoming the coming of peace. Given the experience of Bourbon rule, it may be that such war-weariness was set aside in the excitement of the return of Napoléon, but there yet remains another issue: in brief, with memories of 1814 fresh in their minds, the soldiers who fought in the campaign of the Hundred Days were ready enough to fight so long as there was a chance of victory, but take that chance away and demoralization was liable to become both instant and total. "If Napoleon led [the Army of the North] to victory," writes the American military historian John Elting, "it would shake down into a military machine like the one he had led to Austerlitz, Jena and Friedland. If defeated, it would be hard to rally."<sup>22</sup> While this claim is probably true enough, even this remark is open

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Uffindell, *The Eagle's Last Triumph: Napoleon's Victory at Ligny, June 1815* (London: Greenhill Books, 1994), 40.

<sup>22</sup> Elting, *Swords around a Throne*, 654.

to challenge. As we shall see, the soldiers who rallied to Napoléon in 1815 had many grievances and were determined to secure what they saw as their just desserts—indeed, they might even be eager for a battle that would vindicate their reputation—but that did not mean they were enamored of the idea of a fresh war of conquest. That this was the case is at least suggested by an incident that took place near Avesnes on 10 June at the headquarters of the division commanded by Jérôme Bonaparte. In brief, according to Captain Pierre Robinaux, having arrived to take up his command, Jérôme reviewed the troops and then presided over an open-air repast to which all the officers were invited. Pleasant enough an occasion though this was, it had something of an edge in that the officer in charge of providing the musical entertainment slipped in a song he had composed specially for the occasion whose verses promised that the army would fight for France, whereas its refrain stated baldly that, if fate should eventually lead it to the frontiers of Germany, it would not let itself be used for acts of aggression: “This,” remarked Robinaux, “reflected the wishes of the whole army: had Bonaparte been successful and crossed the river, he would have demoralized it in its entirety.”<sup>23</sup>

To put it mildly, then, it is but necessary to scratch the surface to find that the view of the army was at best ambivalent, if not shot through with contradictions. A further problem is that, in the hurry of mobilization, it had proved difficult to reconstitute the army in the exact state it was in 1814, the result being that many men ended up serving not with much-trusted old comrades but with complete strangers.<sup>24</sup> And, as if this was not enough, the spirit of emulation and competition that had marked the old *grande armée* appears to have been fanned to a state of white heat by the frustrations of the previous year. To quote an anonymous observer who served with the Army of the North in the campaign of Waterloo:

The interior of the army was torn to pieces by an anarchy similar to that which reigned without [NB. a reference to the wholesale pillage in which the troops engaged in all the districts through which they

<sup>23</sup> Gustave Schlumberger, ed., *Journal du route de Capitaine Robinaux, 1803–1832* (Paris: Kessinger Publishing, 2009), 176–77.

<sup>24</sup> See Alessandro Barbero, *The Battle: A History of the Battle of Waterloo* (London: Walker Books, 2005), 35–36.



passed]. It seemed as if an implacable hatred animated one corps against another, and that there existed an open war between them. No mutual sacrifices, no reciprocal confidence, no common feeling, but everywhere selfishness, arrogance and rapacity. When the commander of a column or regiment arrived at the post which he was to occupy, his first care was to seize everything within his reach with a total disregard of anyone who might succeed him. Guards were placed at the doors of houses which contained provisions, and, without any right than that of being the first occupant, they opposed themselves to every kind of division. These sentinels were frequently attacked by soldiers of other parties, and the matter proceeded to blows, in the course [of which] many were wounded, and some even killed, on both sides. The Imperial Guard, in its character of being the janissaries of the despot, were extremely arrogant towards the other troops: they repelled with disdain all commerce and contact with the other branches of the service and were justly detested by them. Their comrades submitted to this pretension only so far as the Imperial Guard were sufficiently numerous to endorse it, but, when they were in less number, they retaliated upon them. The different arms of cavalry were equally jealous and contentious of each other and of the infantry, whilst the latter, confident of its strength and numbers, threatened the cavalry with the bayonet, and insisted upon their own equality of rights and respect.<sup>25</sup>

The French Army, then, was not a force that could be trusted, and certainly not one that was equipped, either mentally or physically, for a long campaign. To sustain it in such a case, what would have been required was a string of victories, and yet such a string of victories was scarcely a likely prospect. On many levels, the French war

<sup>25</sup> *The Journal of the Three Days of the Battle of Waterloo, Being My Own Personal Journal of What I Saw and of the Events in which I Bore a Part during the Battle of Waterloo and Retreat to Paris* (London: T. Chaplin, 1816), 15–16.

machine was no longer the same threat as it had been, say, in the period 1805–7. First of all, there is the issue of Napoléon himself. While there is no definite evidence that he was ill in the campaign of 1815, it is still possible to speculate on his state of health. One thing that does emerge clearly enough in this respect is that he was increasingly prone to moments of introspection and self-doubt of a sort that he could ill afford. Here, for example, is Frank McLynn on the situation that developed in the wake of Ligny and Quatre Bras:

Perhaps Napoleon knew in his heart that the game was up, for he went down with incapacitating illness. . . . Medical historians . . . claim that he was suffering from acromegaly—a disease of pituitary gland among whose symptoms are tiredness and over-optimism—but a more likely diagnosis is a psychogenic reaction to excessive stress and extreme frustration. Napoleon still expressed himself confident of total victory next day. . . . But on the 17th, still suffering from a heavy cold and bladder problems, he fell back into lethargy.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, even if Napoléon was not ill, there is every reason to suppose that he was past his best, and that he had at the very least become physically sluggish. As even ardent Bonapartists admitted, indeed, the old dynamism had gone. To quote the French staff officer Paul Thiébault:

His face . . . had lost all expression and all its forcible character; his mouth, compressed, contained none of its ancient witchery; his very head no longer had the

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<sup>26</sup> Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 617. Setting aside the pressures of the campaign, one issue that was certainly weighing heavily on his spirit was the question of his wife and son: not only had Francis I refused to allow them to travel to Paris to be reunited with him, in early April she had sent him a message requesting a separation. Meanwhile, McLynn's point in respect of Napoléon's feelings in the wake of Quatre Bras and Ligny is corroborated by Drouet: "Wanting to do battle with the English, the emperor made up a force of around 40,000 men under General [*sic*] Grouchy and ordered him to follow closely on the heels of the Prussian army and make sure of the point on which it was directing its retreat. That done, he immediately marched with the rest of his army to rejoin Marshal Ney at Quatre Bras. However, this place had just been evacuated by the English. Coming across me some way short of the position that they had occupied, the emperor said to me in a tone of profound chagrin, 'France is lost.'" Drouet, *Le maréchal Drouet, compte d'Erlon*, 96.

pose which used to characterise the conqueror of the world; and his gait was as perplexed as his demeanour and gestures were undecided. Everything about him seemed to have lost its nature and to be broken up; the ordinary pallor of his skin was replaced by a strongly pronounced greenish tinge.<sup>27</sup>

Just as striking, meanwhile, is the description left by Auguste Petiet, a senior staff officer who served throughout the campaign at the emperor's headquarters.

During his sojourn on Elba, Napoleon's stoutness had increased considerably. His head had acquired a great volume and had sunk into his shoulders, and he was fatter than normal for a man of forty-five. Also it was noticeable that during this campaign he did not remain mounted as long as on previous ones.<sup>28</sup>

Newly appointed as minister of war, the erstwhile hard-man of the Committee of Public Safety, Lazare Carnot, in after years told his son that he had been genuinely shocked by what he had seen.

I no longer recognized him. . . . The audacious escape from Elba appeared to have exhausted even his energetic sap. He drifted, he hesitated; in lieu of acting, this man of the promptest resolution, this man who had once been so imperious, this man to whom

<sup>27</sup> Paul Thiébault, *The Memoirs of Baron Thiébault (Late Lieutenant-General in the French Army)*, vol. 2, trans. Arthur John Butler (London: Macmillan, 1896), 421. In fairness, it has to be said that this image is challenged by Hobhouse, whose descriptions of various reviews he witnessed during his sojourn in Paris paint a picture of a Napoléon much energized by once more being in the presence of his soldiers, and, what is more, a Napoléon who was as adept as ever at charming them into a state of the utmost excitement and adulation, accepting petitions here, handing out a cross of the *Legion d'Honneur* there, and tweaking a nose or pinching a cheek somewhere else. See, for example, Hobhouse, *Letters Written by an Englishman*, vol. 1, 394–95. At a grand review that was held in the Tuileries on 4 June, for example, in which the eagles of every regiment in the army were paraded before him, he is supposed to have spoken to almost every single one of the 10,000 men there, and in general to have affected an extremely jovial and kindly manner. Hobhouse, *Letters Written by an Englishman*, vol. 1, 448–49.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew W. Field, *Prelude to Waterloo: Quatre Bras—The French Perspective* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2014), 28.

a word of counsel would have been regarded as an insult, procrastinated and asked the advice of all and sundry. Hitherto someone who had always not just given full attention to whatever needed his attention, but also never hesitated in taking on yet more work, he now constantly let himself be distracted, whilst he, the man who had always been able to fall asleep and wake up at will, had also become very somnolent. The decomposition of the man had followed on from the decomposition of the empire.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, someone who had occasion to observe Napoléon at unusually close quarters was the captain of HMS *Bellerophon* (1786), Frederick Maitland. While the emperor that he saw was a figure shattered by misfortune and exhausted by many weeks of stress and physical exertion and one who may well have been suffering from a severe bout of depression, the picture that he paints scarcely chimes with the image of the Napoléon of the heyday of *le grand empire*.

Napoleon Bonaparte, when he came on board the *Bellerophon* on the 15th of July 1815, wanted exactly one month of completing his forty-sixth year. . . . From his having become corpulent, he had lost much of his physical energy, and, if we are to give credit to those who attended him, a very considerable portion of his mental energy was also gone. It is certain his habits were very lethargic while he was aboard the *Bellerophon*, for, though he went to bed between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, he frequently fell asleep on his sofa in his cabin in the course of the day. His general appearance was that of a man rather older than he then was.<sup>30</sup>

Whether any of this mattered at Waterloo is obviously a matter of

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<sup>29</sup> Hippolyte Lazare Carnot, ed., *Mémoires sur Carnot, par son fils*, vol. 2 (Paris: Pagnere, 1863), 423.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Lewis Maitland, *The Surrender of Napoleon: Being the Narrative of the Surrender of Buonaparte and of His Residence on Board H.M.S. Bellerophon* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1826), 208–10.

debate. For at least some Bonapartists, there has been a strong desire to emphasize physical infirmity as a causal factor in defeat, as this is an obvious means of deflecting criticisms of Napoléon's generalship as well as a way of connecting his downfall to the vagaries of destiny or fortune. Yet, the emperor's admirers have never been united in taking this position. Flatly denying charges of lethargy, Houssaye, for example, is insistent that the emperor was on good form, even that "Napoleon never exercised the commandership more efficiently and never was his action more direct."<sup>31</sup> To take this line, of course, is immediately to be confronted with the issue of the responsibility for defeat: if Napoléon had his hand firmly on the tiller, it followed that it must ultimately be his fault that France was beaten. Like Napoléon, Houssaye evades this issue by throwing all the blame for defeat on Soult, Grouchy, and a variety of other scapegoats. However,

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<sup>31</sup> Houssaye, *1815: Waterloo*, 293. Also worth noting here is the view of François Guizot: "It has been pretended even by some of his warmest advisers that at this period the genius and energy of Napoleon had declined; and they sought in his tendency to corpulence, in his attacks of languor, in his long slumbers, the explanation of his ill fortune. I believe the reproach to be unfounded, and the pretext frivolous. I can discover in the mind or actions of Napoleon during the hundred days, no symptoms of infirmity; I find in both his accustomed superiority. The causes of his ultimate failure were of a deeper cast: he was not then, as he had long been, upheld and backed by general opinion, and the necessity of security and order felt throughout a great nation; he attempted, on the contrary, a mischievous work, a work inspired only by his own passions and personal wants, rejected by the morality and good sense, as well as by the true interests of France. He engaged in this utterly egotistical enterprise with contradictory means, and in an impossible position. From thence came the reverses he suffered, and the evil he produced." F. Guizot, *Memoirs to Illustrate the History of My Time*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), 65–66. Meanwhile, someone who had a close view of the emperor, albeit of a somewhat brief nature, and was much impressed, was the municipal archivist of the city of Grenoble, Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac. "What we see, indeed, is a whirlwind of activity. That self-same day—8 March—the emperor worked all morning. . . . At one and the same time the most pressing orders were sent out, the most urgent problems set on the road to solution and decrees emitted in the imperial name sent out to every place that acknowledged his rule. . . . At every instant papers were brought to him: he took them from their bearers and either scanned through them or read them in detail. Almost all of them were immediately torn up and thrown under the table where the petitions thus thrown aside lay heaped on top of one another like bones in some devastated cemetery. . . . The freedom of his spirit was visible . . . in the calm that marked his countenance, in the attention that he paid to every detail." M. Champollion-Figeac, ed., *Fourier et Napoléon: Egypte et les cent jours—Mémoires et documents inédits* (Paris: Firmin Didot Freres, 1844), 225–31.

other observers are less forgiving. David Chandler, for example, both admired Napoléon generally and extolled his virtues as a military commander, and yet his judgement of the emperor's performance was deeply hostile:

The chief responsibility for the outcome of the short campaign can only be laid at the door of the emperor himself. The original strategical conception was as brilliant as anything Napoleon ever devised . . . but there were grave flaws undermining the entire effort. . . . In June 1815 Napoleon proved to be obstinate, arrogant and over-confident. . . . He tended to underestimate the courage and staying power of his opponents . . . ignored Blücher's sense of loyalty, and . . . discounted Wellington's ability as a general although there were plenty around him with personal experience of . . . the Iron Duke's superb capabilities as a tactical leader.<sup>32</sup>

It seems, then, that the question of whether Napoléon was ill at Waterloo matters little; much more serious was the fact that he was, at the very least, no longer quite the genius he had been. A weakened Napoléon might not have been so great a problem had he been supported by a team of able commanders, but many of his best marshals

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<sup>32</sup> Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, 1091–92. If Chandler berates Napoléon for his failings in the course of the campaign, Lamarque goes even further. While regarding Napoléon as infinitely preferable to the Bourbons and willing at every step to give him the benefit of every possible doubt in political terms, he was at root a republican and was bitterly critical not so much of the manner in which Napoléon conducted the campaign, but rather of the very thinking that underpinned it. In his eyes, rather than attacking, Napoléon should rather have adopted a defensive strategy while at the same time proclaiming a republic—something that he claimed would have elicited pro-French risings across Europe—and making every effort to arm the people and prepare the way for guerrilla warfare. He wrote, “Instead of this, whether driven by his unquiet spirit, or irritated by the petty *contretemps* that he faced at home, the emperor decided to essay a grand coup, to play a game of *trente et quarante* [a form of blackjack], in short to consign both his existence as a sovereign and that of France as a nation to the throw of a dice.” Lamarque, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 1, 32–34, 77. However, while the suggestion that Napoléon was no longer capable of rational thought in 1815 is interesting, it can be argued that his conduct was very much part and parcel of a wider picture that is visible throughout his career. See Charles J. Esdaile, “De-constructing the French Wars: Napoleon as Anti-strategist,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 4 (August 2008): 515–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390802088416>.

were either dead, not available, or loyal to the Bourbons. His habitual chief of staff, Louis-Alexandre Berthier, had fled into exile in Germany rather than take up arms with him again and subsequently committed suicide; Józef Antoni Poniatowski, Jean-Baptiste Bessières, and Jean Lannes were dead in battle; Joachim Murat was in Naples; Bon-Adrien Jannot de Moncey, André Masséna, Dominique-Catherine Pérignon, Claude Victor, Pierre Augereau, Laurent de Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Jacques Macdonald, Nicolas-Charles Oudinot, and Auguste-Frédéric-Louis Viesse de Marmont had all either refused to abandon Louis XVIII altogether or not done so quickly enough for Napoléon's liking; and François-Christophe Kellermann, Jean-Mathieu-Philibert Sérurier, and François-Joseph Lefebvre were too old for service. All that he had left were Soult, Ney, Guillaume Brune, Louis-Nicolas Davout, Édouard-Adolphe-Casimir-Joseph Mortier, Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, and Louis-Gabriel Suchet, these being joined at the last minute by Grouchy, a prominent cavalry commander promoted to the rank of marshal following a series of successes against Royalist rebels in the south of France in the weeks prior to the Waterloo campaign. As Andrew Roberts writes, "Although fourteen marshals had fought in the Austerlitz campaign, seventeen in the Polish campaign, fifteen in the Iberian campaign, twelve in the Wagram campaign, thirteen in the Russian campaign, fourteen in the Leipzig campaign and eleven in the 1814 campaign, only three were present in the Waterloo campaign."<sup>33</sup>

This, however, was scarcely a winning team: when given a chance—and in 1815 it has to be said that Napoléon harried him unmercifully and on several occasions treated him so badly that he contemplated resignation—Davout, certainly, was brilliant and Suchet very good, but that was about all that could be said, and even then it has to be said that Suchet had spent the entire period from 1809 to 1814 fighting in Spain and was therefore lacking in experience with respect to the sort of campaigns that now threatened.<sup>34</sup> Let us begin with Soult, the man to whom Napoléon gave the role of chief of staff. If Soult was a commander with a combat record that could at best be described as variable, he was much disliked by almost all his fellow

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon the Great* (London: Penguin, 2015), 744.

<sup>34</sup> See Schom, *One Hundred Days*, 195–99.

generals on account of his arrogant manner. Certainly, the accounts of those who served with him in Spain are far from flattering. For a particularly mordant summation of his personality, we might turn to his chief aide de camp, Alfred de Saint-Chamans.

I do not believe that it would be possible to meet a man who knew how to hide so much ability, perspicacity and finesse in the management of affairs beneath so gross an exterior. . . . In war he loved bold enterprises, and expressed himself with great force once he had settled on a course of action. . . . That said, it was well known that he did not risk his own person too much in that respect. . . . On the contrary, one could accuse him of . . . being too careful in respect of keeping out of danger, this deficiency having grown in proportion with the great fortune that he had amassed (it is not, after all, uncommon to meet officers who do not worry about getting themselves killed when they are mere colonels . . . but later hide behind a marshal's baton).<sup>35</sup>

This passage is, perhaps, a little unfair. In the words of another officer who served in Spain named Hippolyte d'Espinchal, "Attentive to the welfare of the soldier . . . as well as careful to be sparing of his blood, he was just, fair and contemptuous of all intrigue. At the same time, meanwhile, appreciative of true merit, he never forgot any officer fortunate enough to have attracted his attention."<sup>36</sup> Yet, even so,

<sup>35</sup> Alfred-Armand-Robert de Saint-Chamans, *Mémoires du Général Comte de Saint-Chamans, ancien aide de camp du Maréchal Soult, 1802–1832* (Paris: Plon, 1896), 34–35, hereafter *Mémoires*. In accusing Soult of cowardice, Saint-Chamans, an embittered individual who seems to have been convinced that the marshal could have done more to further his career, may have gone too far, but it is clear that in battle Soult had a habit of producing ambitious plans and then failing to see that they were executed effectively.

<sup>36</sup> Note that even d'Espinchal has to admit that Soult could be "severe, brusque and, on occasion, greedy." Hippolyte d'Espinchal, *Souvenirs militaires, 1792–1814*, ed. Frédéric Masson and François Boyer (Paris: P. Ollendorff, 1901), 46–48. Meanwhile, according to several veterans of the Spanish war, one divisional commander was subjected to so brutal a dressing-down by him that the unfortunate man immediately committed suicide. See L. F. Lejeune, *Memoirs of Baron Lejeune, Aide-de-Camp to Marshals Berthier, Davout, and Oudinot*, trans. [Nancy] Bell (London: Longmans, Green, 1897), 74; and Sébastien Blaze, *Mémoires d'un apothicaire sur la guerre d'Espagne pendant les années 1808 à 1814*, vol. 2 (Paris: Ladvocat, 1828), 216.



the general picture that emerges is one of a haughty and imperious satrap. Another veteran of the Spanish campaign was Antoine Fée, who wrote,

As commander of the Army of the South, the marshal appeared more as the King of Andalucía than as a simple lieutenant of the emperor. No monarch ever surrounded himself with as much majesty, nor was any court ever more servile than his. As Homer said of Jupiter, he could make Olympus tremble with a movement of his head. . . . The marshal was always accompanied by an imposing guard. On Sundays these élite troops formed a corridor leading to the door of the cathedral and presented arms at his passage, whilst he was followed by the civil authorities and a glittering general staff. . . . Formed in the school of the emperor, meanwhile, he echoed both his gestures and his style of address.<sup>37</sup>

This, then, was not the famously self-effacing Marshal Berthier who had served Napoléon so well as chief of staff ever since 1803, and his conduct of affairs has often been fiercely criticized. In the words of David Chandler, “Soult was to be responsible for perpetrating several mistakes and misunderstandings in the written orders he issued and these, taken together, account for a great deal of Napoleon’s ultimate difficulties.”<sup>38</sup> In this respect, there is at least room for doubt. One cannot but admire the manner in which he got the battered forces that had been so badly defeated at the Battle of Vitoria on 21 June 1813 back into action in the Pyrenees in little more than a month, while his record in Spain suggests that he was actually a better staff officer than he was a battlefield commander.<sup>39</sup> But even so, some commen-

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<sup>37</sup> A. L. A. Fée, *Souvenirs de la guerre d’Espagne, dite de l’indépendance, 1809–1813* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frère, 1856), 135–36.

<sup>38</sup> Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, 1021. According to Elting, who provides a considerable list of the evidence of his carelessness, Soult “was accused (possibly with some exaggeration) of having made more mistakes in four days than Berthier had in 19 years.” Elting, *Swords around a Throne*, 655.

<sup>39</sup> To this end, it is worth noting that even the hostile Saint-Chamans was forced to admit that Soult “forgot nothing, and was as much abreast of the smallest details as he was of the greatest military operations.” Saint-Chamans, *Mémoires*, 34.

tators insist that he should have been given the Ministry of War and Davout selected in his place.<sup>40</sup> Yet, even had his talent equaled that of Berthier, there would still have been a problem in that he had served Louis XVIII as minister of war and was therefore regarded by many soldiers as little more than a traitor. To quote Maximilien Lamarque, “Soult believed he could govern the army, but he failed to see that the rod of iron of the past had taken the arm of an emperor to wield: he turned stomachs, excited hatred, provoked resistance, and he would surely have come to grief anyway even had this fate not been accelerated by the great catastrophe that we are about to narrate.”<sup>41</sup>

So much for Soult. What, though, of his fellow marshals? Of Ney, Brune, Mortier, Suchet, and Jourdan—the five other figures of this rank who had joined Napoléon—only Suchet was much more than competent, while Ney in particular was very possibly suffering from some form of post-traumatic stress disorder on account of his harrowing experiences as commander of the rear guard during the retreat from Moscow.<sup>42</sup> As for Grouchy, while he had a very good record, he was completely lacking in experience of commanding formations made up of infantry, cavalry, and artillery; still worse, the fact that he was promoted to the level, in effect, of an army commander, meant that the French cavalry in particular were deprived of a man who might very well have got a far better result out of them at Mont Saint-Jean than was actually the case.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Predictably enough, Soult’s most recent English-language biographer, Peter Hayman, is vigorous in his refutation of such remarks, pointing out that, in contrast to his diatribes in respect of Ney and Grouchy, Napoléon is not recorded as having uttered any criticism of Soult on Saint Helena. See Peter Hayman, *Soult: Napoleon’s Maligned Marshal* (London: Arms and Armour, 1990), 232.

<sup>41</sup> Lamarque, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 1, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Ney’s behavior in 1815 has come in for much comment. According to an admiring chronicler writing in the very wake of his execution, the problem was rather guilt. “Though still without fear, he was no longer without reproach: the memory of just one action had poisoned his entire life. He marched ahead of the man who had cost him so many sacrifices, but he did so without joy, without energy, in the style of a man who was attempting to expunge a deep stain with which his conduct had besmirched him.” Raymond Balthazar Maizeau, *Vie du Maréchal Ney, duc d’Elchingen, prince de la Moskowa* (Paris: Chez Pillet, 1816), 152.

<sup>43</sup> One commander whose absence Napoléon particularly lamented was Joachim Murat. Indeed, on Saint Helena, he went so far as to claim that, had Murat been present at Waterloo, the day would have been won. “I informed him that . . . it was asserted that Murat had imputed the loss of the battle of Waterloo to the cavalry not being properly

At corps level, meanwhile, things were not much better: here, too, much talent had been lost, and this showed all too clearly. Mouton, Gérard, and Reille were solid enough—Reille, indeed, had been the one French general to emerge with credit from Vitoria—but Vandamme was the man responsible for the disaster at Kulm in September 1813, while Drouet was a nonentity who had repeatedly failed to distinguish himself in Spain.<sup>44</sup> Assuming that Napoléon was able to sustain the immense strain of the war that threatened, was this really the command element needed to steer the French Army through what promised to be a greater trial than it had faced even in 1813 and 1814? “Although the army was superb and full of ardour,” wrote Jean-Baptiste Lemonnier-Delafosse, “it was necessary to rejuvenate its leadership.” He continued,

However, more a slave to his memories and habits than might be imagined, the emperor made the mistake of putting it back under the leadership of its old commanders. Despite their decision to rally to the crown, the majority continued to desire the triumph of the

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employed, and that he had said that if he (Murat) had commanded then the French would have gained the victory. ‘It is very probable,’ replied Napoleon. ‘I could not be everywhere, and Murat was the best cavalry officer in the world. He would have given more impetuosity to the charge. There wanted but very little, I assure you, to gain the day for me. Break two or three battalions, and in all probability Murat would have effected this.’ Barry E. O’Meara, *Napoleon in Exile, or, a Voice from Saint Helena: The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon on the Most Important Events of His Life and Government in His own Words*, vol. 2 (London, W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1822), 60–61. Finally, another commander who was under par in 1815 was Mortier: appointed to the command of the Imperial Guard, on the very eve of the campaign he fell ill and had to be replaced by Drouet.

<sup>44</sup> The only English-language biography of Vandamme takes a favorable view of him as a commander and implies that he was treated as a scapegoat in the wake of Kulm, but it scarcely makes a strong claim for him as a general. “A dedicated career soldier and an excellent division and corps commander, he was a thorn in the side of . . . Napoleon and most every officer under whom he served. Like Patton, he was the man any king would want to lead troops into battle, but he was outspoken to a fault. His exalted opinion of his own military talents and his low esteem of his contemporaries resulted in numerous problems with those above him in the hierarchy.” John G. Gallagher, *Napoleon’s Infant Terrible: General Dominique Vandamme* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 3. Meanwhile, Drouet’s memoirs suggest a man constantly ready to shift the burden of guilt to other shoulders and unflinchingly keen to portray himself as an overlooked military genius, as witness, for example, his account of Vitoria. See Drouet, *Le maréchal Drouet*, 76–79.

imperial cause, but for the most part they nevertheless did not appear disposed to serve with the enthusiasm and devotion that the circumstances demanded. These were no longer the men who, full of youth and ambition, gave generously of their lives to achieve promotion and fame: they were men tired of war, who, having achieved the highest positions and been enriched by pillage of the enemy and the generosity of Napoleon alike, had no other desire than to enjoy their fortune peacefully in the shadow of their laurels.<sup>45</sup>

If this was so, however, it was not the only reason for the lack of enthusiasm that was so evident. Also an issue was the fact that, recognizing, as they did, the problems inherent in Napoléon's position, many senior officers were openly defeatist. Returning to the subject of Jérôme Bonaparte's open-air lunch with the officers of his division, we find that Pierre Robinaux came away deeply troubled. As he wrote,

In the whole course of the meal I did not once hear the prince say anything positive, whilst, pensive and worried as it was, his demeanour did not appear to me to augur particularly well. Such an attitude on the part of the brother of our emperor was not such as to electrify the heart of the soldier and gave courage to the army: indeed, I regarded his downcast air as the prelude to a ruin that seemed all too proximate.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Christophe Bourachot, ed., *Souvenirs militaires du Capitaine Jean-Baptiste Lemonnier-Delafose* (Paris: Le Livre chez vous, 2002), 201. This translation owes something to the one offered by Andrew Field: see Andrew W. Field, *Prelude to Waterloo: Quatre Bras—The French Perspective* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2014), 18. Much the same point is made by Ménéval, who claims that “certain of the principal leaders of the army, demoralised by the recollection of the events of 1814, had lost that energy and confidence which often forces the hand of success.” See Baron Claude Francois de Ménéval, *Memoirs to Serve for the History of Napoleon I from 1803 to 1815*, vol. 3, ed. Robert H. Sherard (London: Hutchinson, 1895), 452. For the most recent discussion of the marshals, see David G. Chandler, ed., *Napoleon's Marshals* (London: Macmillan, 1986). For details on officers such as Vandamme and Drouet, see Jean Tulard, *Dictionnaire Napoléon* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); and Alain Pigeard, *Les Etoiles de Napoléon* (Paris: Quatuor, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> Schlumberger, *Journal de route de Capitaine Robinaux*, 177.

In 1815, then, Napoléon's war machine was anything but its old self: less likely to win battles than before, it was also less likely to be able to sustain defeat.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, it also has to be recognized that, if of variable quality, the armies that it would have had to face were not those of the days of Austerlitz, Jena, and Wagram. Given the dramatic defeat on which this work is postulated, we can here assume that the Anglo-Dutch Army would have been pretty much out of the reckoning for the rest of the campaign: although reinforced by the arrival of many of the Peninsular War battalions that had been sent to fight in the War of 1812, one suspects that the political pressure to avoid a repeat of Waterloo would have in effect limited it to secondary operations, such as the recovery of Belgium.

As it follows from this that the bulk of the fighting would have been done by Austrians, Prussians, and Russians, little need be said here about the Anglo-Dutch other than to note the fact that they had put up a very good fight at Waterloo and would probably have emerged from it as a force that, if numerically reduced, was much stronger in terms of quality; at the time of Waterloo at least 16 infantry battalions that had fought in the peninsula were still in transit from America, while others could have been called back from stations such as Gibraltar.<sup>48</sup> Deeply frustrated at having missed out on the first chance British troops had ever had to do battle with Napoléon, the men involved would beyond doubt have arrived in Antwerp eager for the fray. For example, according to the editor of the memoirs of Sir George Bell, in 1814 an ensign of the 34th Foot who was stood down

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<sup>47</sup> In fairness, the French Army recovered from Waterloo surprisingly well. Grouchy's troops returned to France undefeated—indeed, they even inflicted a number of reverses on the Prussians—and showed real spirit in their response to the allied attacks on Paris, while considerable defiance was also visible elsewhere, a few fortresses even hanging on into the autumn. However, it is important to note that none of the men concerned had gone through the experience of Waterloo and that awareness of just how crushing the defeat had been was limited: writing in his journal at some point after the battle, Stanhope noted that “the French scarce allow a defeat.” Gareth Glover, ed., *Eyewitness to the Peninsular War and the Battle of Waterloo: The Letters and Journal of the Honourable Sir James Stanhope, 1803 to 1825* (Barnsely, UK: Pen and Sword, 2010), 179.

<sup>48</sup> See Richard Partridge and Michael Oliver, *Napoleonic Army Handbook: The British Army and Its Allies*, vol. 1 (London: Constable and Robinson, 1999), 60–81. For a general assessment of the British Army, see Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *The Armies of Wellington* (Leicester, UK: Brockhampton Press, 2000).

at the close of hostilities and put on half pay, when his battalion was mustered once again in 1815 it was most disappointed that it was not sent to Belgium to take part in the fighting.<sup>49</sup>

What, though, of the armies of the eastern powers? Here the obvious place to begin is with that of Prussia. Assuming that Blücher and August von Gneisenau would have managed to disentangle themselves from the sort of Anglo-Dutch defeat on which this work is postulated, we can assume that, not counting any reserves sent up from Prussia (potentially, the Royal Guard and two more corps), they would have had a force of at least 100,000 men available for immediate service, and possibly many more.<sup>50</sup> As to what these troops were capable of, one has only to look at the battles of Ligny and Waterloo. As Peter Hofschröder observes, the aspect the Prussian forces presented in 1815 was scarcely encouraging. Indeed, he is positively scathing in his assessment: “The armed forces fielded by the Kingdom of Prussia in 1815 were in terms of manpower, equipment and coherence of organization probably the worst Prussia employed in the entire Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.”<sup>51</sup> The problems, indeed, were manifold. In brief, war could hardly have come at a worse moment for Prussia in that the army was still in the process of incorporating all the new formations that had fallen to its lot as a result of the territorial changes authorized by the Congress of Vienna. These had produced substantial gains for Prussia in the form of the Grand Duchy of Berg, a large part of the Kingdom of Westphalia, strips of

<sup>49</sup> Brian Stuart, ed., *Soldier's Glory, Being "Rough Notes of an Old Soldier" by Sir George Bell Arranged and Edited by His Kinsman, Brian Stuart* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1956), 148.

<sup>50</sup> Blücher had gone into the campaign of Waterloo with 117,000 men. Of these, 20,000 had been lost in one way or another at Ligny, while it may be assumed that at least another 10,000 could have gone the same way in the fighting at Wavre and Plancenoit, to which should be added a considerable number of deserters. Let us say, then, that 80,000 men were still with the colors when the army fell back across the Rhine, but this figure takes no account of the 26,000 troops from the armies of those German states that had been assigned to the command of the Prussians who had been deployed to watch the valley of the river Moselle under Friedrich Kleist, and could easily have been marched to join Blücher. Of the quality of these troops we need say no more than that, like many of the foreign auxiliaries in Wellington's army at Waterloo, they were schooled in the tactics of the *grande armée*, but capable of little more than second-line duties. As in 1814, then, they were to spend the campaign of 1815 blockading French fortresses, but, for all that, they would still have come as a useful reinforcement.

<sup>51</sup> Hofschröder, *1815: The Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 1, 59.

both Saxony and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and the whole of the left bank of the Rhine. Excellent though all this as far as Potsdam was concerned, translating the military resources that the new territories represented into reality was not a simple matter, while further complications were caused by the need to absorb a number of the more or less unruly volunteer units raised in the war of 1813 into the regular army. Some of what this entailed was easy enough; the two infantry regiments possessed by the Grand Duchy of Berg, for example, were simply relabeled as the Infantry Regiments 28 and 29, and those of the so-called Russo-German Legion (a force raised from German troops who had fallen into the hands of the Prussian Army in the War of 1812) as Infantry Regiments 30 and 31, but other units had to be improvised from a variety of different sources including large numbers of more or less unwilling conscripts. Yet another issue was that the combined grenadier battalions that had previously been fielded as part of the line infantry of each brigade had over the course of the winter been taken from their parent formations and sent off to Berlin for incorporation into an expanded royal guard. Many regiments, then, marched to war in a state of considerable disorganization with both coherence and experience in short supply, the problems involved seemingly being especially severe among the cavalry and artillery that were the vital component in the offensive capacity of any army of the Napoleonic epoch. As if all this was not enough, there was considerable infighting among the Prussian generals—for example, the commander of the IV Corps, Bülow, was deeply jealous of the chief of staff, Gneisenau, and was so reluctant to obey his orders that his troops never arrived at Ligny and were extremely slow to get into action when they reached the fringes of the battlefield of Waterloo—while even uniforms were in short supply, the two regiments mentioned above having to serve throughout the campaign in the white and green uniforms they had worn prior to 1814. As Hofschröder concludes, “The Army of the Lower Rhine was indeed a rag-tag force that presented a sorry picture.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hofschröder, *1815: The Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 1, 69. Ever determined to maximize Prussian glory, it has to be said that Hofschröder has something of an axe to grind here: in brief, the more that the problems faced by the Prussian Army in 1815 are emphasized, the greater appear Blücher’s achievements at Waterloo, and the easier it is to explain away defeat at Ligny. At all events, Müffling provides us with a much more pos-

This, however, is but half the story. The problems detailed by Hofschröder were serious enough, but the Prussian Army could call on a number of strengths that had already been in evidence in the campaign of 1813–14. This is not the place to retail the history of the reform movement that had been set in train in the wake of the catastrophic defeats of Jena and Auerstädt, but, in brief, the army had been provided with a highly efficient general staff, a permanent system of higher formations, and a new tactical doctrine marked by great flexibility and the use of large numbers of skirmishers, while, in theory at least, the officer corps had been rejuvenated, thrown open to the middle classes, and subjected to a much improved system of training. In 1813, meanwhile, all this had been augmented by the introduction of the principle of universal military service. Henceforward, all unmarried men in good health aged 17–24 who were not otherwise engaged in the war effort—a provision that allowed young men of the middle classes to avoid serving with the masses provided they signed up for either a *freikorps* (volunteer corps) or one of the new volunteer *jäger* (light infantry) battalions raised as officer training units—were to be balloted for service in the regular army, and all

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itive picture. “The troops of the Army of the [Lower] Rhine turned out in good state from their winter quarters, the recruits well-drilled . . . well-fed, healthy, well-clothed, in the best state of discipline and eager for war. The troops recently placed on the Prussian footing were all in the same condition, i.e. the free corps transformed into battalions of the line, the Russo-German Legion, the regiments of the Grand Duchy of Berg and the still unapportioned Saxons.” On the other hand, he does agree that there was considerable jealousy of Gneisenau: “The more it became known that Gneisenau really commanded the army and that Blücher merely acted as an example as the bravest in battle and the most indefatigable in exertion, understanding only to stimulate others by fiery speeches, the louder became the discontent of the four generals who had commanded armies in 1814 and were senior in commission.” Baron Müffling, *Passages from My Life; Together with Memoirs of the Campaign of 1813 and 1814*, ed. Col Philip Yorke (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), 224–25. Meanwhile, other observers were genuinely impressed with what they saw. Here, for example, is Lord John Henry Palmerston’s account of a review he attended outside Paris on 4 September 1815: “I went at eight to a sham fight of the Prussians in the plain of Grenelle about two miles out of Paris. There appeared to be about 20,000 men of all arms. They were drawn up in two bodies, and, after some evolutions of cavalry, one line advanced and the other retired. . . . The manoeuvres were said to represent the later attack of the Prussians upon Paris. . . . The troops manoeuvred with great quickness and accuracy and the Duke of Wellington was much pleased with their manner of deploying from column.” Viscount Palmerston, *Selections from Private Journals of Tours in France in 1815 and 1818* (London: Richard Bentley, 1871), 12.



those 24–45 for service in a mobile militia entitled the *landwehr*. Finally, all those that were left over, together with boys age 15–17, unmarried men age 45–60, and all married men whatsoever were, if necessary, to serve in a home defense force: the *landsturm*.<sup>53</sup>

These reforms did not create a first-class military force overnight, while they were not even fully implemented. On the contrary, the *landsturm* was rarely mobilized, while a combination of circumstance and sleight of hand ensured that the officer corps remained dominated by the nobility, Prussia witnessing no equivalent of the dramatic events that took place in the French officer corps in the early years of the Revolutionary Wars. Also problematic was the quality of many of the rank and file: the *freikorps*—units of patriotic volunteers raised by passionate German nationalists such as Adolf von Lutzow—were extremely undisciplined and as much given to posturing and plunder as they were to fighting the French, and regulars and *landwehr* alike were short of training, equipment, and uniforms. Also problematic was the popular response to conscription: while the middle classes and the urban population in general rallied to the cause of the war against Napoléon, the peasantry were much less enthusiastic, frequently taking flight rather than submitting to conscription and deserting in large numbers when they did fall into the hands of the state. Yet, the Prussian Army still emerged as a force to be reckoned with. In part, this was a matter of luck in the form of the survival of a group of generals of real quality, among them Blücher, Johann Yorck von Wartenburg, and Friedrich von Kleist. However, the issue was also systemic: thus, the general staff succeeded in eliminating the chaos that had characterized the Prussian war effort in 1806, while the fact that every corps and divisional commander was assigned a chief of staff drawn from that body ensured that plans

<sup>53</sup> Despite its age, the most detailed guide to the reform of the Prussian Army in the wake of Jena and Auerstädt remains William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms, 1786–1813* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), but this can usefully be supplemented by Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1955), 37–62; and Walter M. Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807–1819* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 145–80. On the subject of conscription, in particular, meanwhile, see D. Walter, “Meeting the French Challenge: Conscription in Prussia, 1807–1815,” in Donald Stoker, Frederick C. Schneid, and Harold D. Blanton, eds., *Conscription in the Napoleonic Era: A Revolution in Military Affairs?* (London: Routledge, 2009), 24–45.

were disseminated in detail throughout the army.<sup>54</sup> However, if this suggests that the command of the army was rigidly centralized, nothing could be further from the case: at every level, commanders were encouraged to use their own judgement and to act on their own initiative, this being an idea that continued to permeate the Prussian Army's successors right up until the Second World War. And, finally, the tactical system employed in the campaigns of 1813–15 worked extremely well in that it could not have been better suited to the organization that was habitual in the Prussian Army. Thus, it was laid down that infantry should always be deployed in three echelons consisting of a thick skirmish screen, a main battle line, and a reserve, this being a scheme for which a standard infantry brigade consisting of either a jäger battalion or some attached rifle companies, two three-battalion line-infantry regiments, and one three-battalion landwehr regiment was almost purpose built: in brief, the jäger and the line infantry could seek to weaken the enemy by the use of firepower while, incapable of doing anything more than charging the enemy in close column, the poorly trained militiamen could be held back and then sent in for the kill at the last minute.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Confusingly, the Prussian Army employed a slightly different terminology than all other armies of the Napoleonic period. In place of the usual model of corps, division, and brigade, the Prussians preferred to use that of the corps, brigade, and regiment. A brigade commander in the Prussian Army was therefore the equivalent of a divisional commander in other forces. With regard to the general staff, meanwhile, while its existence did not save the Prussians from the occasional error—in this respect, in particular, it has to be said that the arrangements made to get Blücher's forces from Wavre to Waterloo were scarcely a triumph of staffwork and could have cost the allied cause very dear—nothing resembling the catalog of disaster that dogged Napoléon's forces ever affected Blücher's troops. In a key area of the military art, then, military superiority had deserted Napoléon.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Prussian tactical system, see Peter Hofschröder, *Prussian Napoleonic Tactics* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2011). Brigades also included a battery of six-pounder guns, these troops being intended for the purpose of close support. In at least some cases, some squadrons of cavalry were attached as well, and this may well have been a confession of the unreliability of the landwehr in combat. However, most mounted troops were held back at corps level in cavalry reserves, each of which consisted of three regiments. In all, a Prussian corps would contain four infantry brigades, a cavalry reserve, and an artillery reserve that typically contained four batteries of foot artillery, two batteries of horse artillery, and a battery of howitzers. For a full order of battle of the Prussian Army in 1815, see "Order of Battle of the Prussian Army in 1815 (Waterloo Campaign)," Napoleon, His Army and Enemies, accessed 20 July 2015. Oliver Schmidt, "The Prussian Army," in Gregory Fremont-Barnes, ed., *Armies of the*

Diluted though they had been by the heavy losses suffered in the campaign of 1813–14 and the changes in organization that followed the coming of peace, these advantages undoubtedly helped the tattered Prussian forces function more effectively in 1815 than might otherwise have been the case: at the very least, the advent of universal conscription meant that, so long as the state continued to function, and, in particular, to enjoy the support of the elites, defeats could be absorbed without too much difficulty. Meanwhile, something else that needs to be looked at is the question of their morale and fighting spirit. Starting at the top, there is the leadership provided by the exceptional team constituted by Blücher and Gneisenau. Driven by extreme hatred of the French—it was only with the greatest difficulty that Wellington succeeded in dissuading them from blowing up the Pont d’Iéna in Paris—they instilled a spirit of the offensive into the forces under their command and refused point-blank even to think about the notion of failure. If the chief of staff was always a figure in the background supervising the movements of the army and dealing with myriad issues concerning planning and organization, Blücher was very much a soldier’s soldier who was much given to charging into battle at the head of his troops; famously, of course, at Ligny he was thrown from his horse and then ridden over by Prussian and French cavalry alike while leading such a charge, but at the Battle of Lützen, fought on 2 May 1813, he also distinguished himself in similar fashion, leading attack after attack on the French even after he had received a painful wound in the side from a spent musket ball, and having almost literally to be dragged away from the battlefield when the time came for retreat. To fight the enemy, indeed, was at all times his first instinct. As Karl Frieher von Müffling remarked in his memoirs, “His imperturbability in dangerous situations, his tenacity in misfortune and his courage which grew under difficulties were based on an awareness of his physical strength, which he had often used in hand-to-hand fighting during earlier campaigns. In this way he had gradually convinced himself that there was no military predicament from which one could not ultimately extricate oneself by fighting.”<sup>56</sup> Impulsive, warm-hearted, and insanely brave,

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*Napoleonic Wars* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2011), 98–126, constitutes a helpful overview.

<sup>56</sup> Antony Brett-James, comp., *Europe against Napoleon: The Leipzig Campaign, 1813*,

on the march he was constantly to be seen riding among his troops and encouraging them onward, the net result being that he was nicknamed Marschall Vorwärts (an alternative nickname and one that in many ways was just as apposite was “the hussar general”). An old family friend who encountered him for the first time in many years in 1813 left a verbal portrait that is affectionate, yet at the same time very telling.

When I called on our old hussar general, he was cheerful as always and displayed that rare joviality with which he always knew how to win the hearts of those around him. He was . . . still the same man I had known before: rank, fame and years had not affected him in the slightest. He laughed, joked and also swore like any good hussar officer, and for everyone, high and low, general or corporal, he had a coarse joke, an apt jest, but also, if he thought it necessary, a rebuke. This unaffected joviality, which nothing put off, was of inestimable value to the Army of Silesia and helped substantially to improve it and to fit it for great deeds.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes, it has to be said, Blücher took enthusiasm to excess: if he fought too far forward at Ligny, he also came to within an ace of wrecking the entire campaign of 1814 by insisting on going it alone at the head of his Army of Silesia when the allied commander in chief, Karl von Schwarzenberg, refused to sanction a full-scale offensive in the wake of the allied victory at La Rothière, the net result being the hammer blows of the battles of Champaubert, Vauchamps, and Montmirail. Yet, if fighting at Ligny risked disaster, on the whole such was the superiority enjoyed by the allies in the last campaigns of the war that what mattered more than anything else was the fact that the Prussian Army could count on charismatic leadership of the first order: indeed, if ever there was a general who was capable of getting the best out of inexperienced troops, it was Gebhardt von Blücher. However, morale is a quality that does not flow from the top, but is

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from *Eyewitness Accounts* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 45.

<sup>57</sup> Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 47. For a modern biography, see Michael V. Leggiere, *Blücher: Scourge of Napoleon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

also something that is organic to the rank and file. Let us begin here with a somewhat stereotypical view in the form of the description of a regiment of Prussian troops that Archibald Alison observed in Brussels late in 1814.

We saw a body of 3000 Prussian *landwehr* enter Brussels, shortly before we left the city. The appearance of these men was very striking. They had just terminated a march of 14 miles, under a burning sun, and were all covered with dust and sweat. Notwithstanding the military service in which they had been engaged, they still bore the appearance of their country occupations; their sun-burnt faces, their rugged features, and massy limbs, bespoke the life of laborious industry to which they had been habituated. They wore a uniform coat or frock [and] a military cap, and their arms and accoutrements were in the most admirable order; but in other respects, their dress was no other than what they had worn at home. The sight of these brave men told, in stronger language than words could convey, the grievous oppression to which Prussia had been subjected, and the unexampled valour with which her people had risen against the iron yoke of French dominion. They were not regular soldiers, raised for the ordinary service of the state, and arrayed in the costume of military life; they were not men of a separate profession, maintained by government for the purposes of defence; they were the *people of the country*, roused from their peaceful employments by the sense of public danger, and animated by the heroic determination to avenge the sufferings of their native land. The young were there, whose limbs were yet unequal to the weight of the arms which they had to bear; the aged were there, whose strength had been weakened by a life of labour and care; all, of whatever rank or station, marched alike in the ranks which their valour and their patriotism had formed. Their appearance suited the sacred cause in which they had been engaged, and marked the magnitude of the efforts which

their country had made. They were still, in some measure, in the garb of rural life, but the determination of their step, the soldier-like regularity of their motions, and the enthusiastic expression of their countenances, indicated the unconquerable spirit by which they had been animated, and told the greatness of the sufferings which had at last awakened.<sup>58</sup>

The ideas that underpin this passage are, of course, a central part of the myth of the so-called “War of Liberation”: in brief, the people of Germany are seen nobly taking up arms with one accord and striding out in search of justice and revenge. This is a recurrent image that crops up time and again in accounts of the campaigns of 1813 and 1814. “What an inward transformation of the whole being this crusade for freedom and Fatherland has effected in everyone,” wrote Friedrich Förster, a recent graduate of the University of Jena who enlisted in the famous Lutzow freikorps and went on to become a distinguished historian. “You would scarcely recognise those old braggarts from the [Universities of] Jena and Halle, who based their reputations on having drunk so many jugs of beer, on having fought so many [duels], or on having broken the rector’s windows. Now they stand in rank and file [and] obey the words of command, and our whole existence has been inspired with a sense of dedication which we never suspected.”<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, Karl Friccius, the commander of an East Prussian landwehr battalion, wrote,

I cannot praise adequately the men’s willing acceptance of all the fatigues and deprivations, their obedient compliance with orders, their attentiveness and composure under arms, their increasing love of order, the skill with which individuals learned to behave in a natural warlike manner. Nor can I give high enough praise to the way in which they lived peaceably together, how each man considered the good name of his company, and of the entire battalion, as his own, and, above all, how they were imbued with the sense of one

<sup>58</sup> Alison, *Travels in France during the Years 1814–15*, vol. 1, 280–81.

<sup>59</sup> Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 21–22.

for all and all for one in times of danger and difficulty, and of risking their lives for King and Fatherland.<sup>60</sup>

Such passages have, of course, to be read with caution. As we have already seen, among the common people, fighting the French was far less popular than is suggested here, large numbers of conscripts to the landwehr, in particular, either deserting or proving utterly unreliable on the battlefield, while such data as we possess on the background of those men who volunteered for military service suggest that their decision was driven as much by poverty as it was by patriotism.<sup>61</sup> Yet, both in the campaigns of 1813–14 and 1815, it cannot be gainsaid that the Prussian Army fought with a savagery that was rarely equaled in the annals of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Wenzel Krimer was a surgeon with a Prussian infantry battalion that was engaged in the battle of Leipzig; he wrote:

With wild shouts of “Hurrah!” and lowered bayonets, our brave men immediately set off to storm the redoubt. “Children!” shouted Major von Ziegler while we were advancing through a fearful hail of bullets which knocked down whole files, “You must now wipe out the stains of Kulm from your colours! Any man who retreats a single step before we have taken the battery is a cur!” “Forwards! Forwards!” they all cried, running into the attack. . . . An enemy column . . . advanced against us, but was knocked to the ground with [muskets] butts. We reached the redoubt and . . . the troops stormed their way straight up the rampart. Their fury knew no bounds . . . and a dreadful slaughter . . . ensued. The gunners were killed beside their guns . . . All this was the work of ten minutes.<sup>62</sup>

From the other side, we have the view of Hippolyte de Mauduit, a sergeant in the Old Guard. Here is his account of the struggle that took place around the village of La Haye during the battle of Ligny:

<sup>60</sup> Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 41.

<sup>61</sup> See Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (London: Penguin, 2006), 366.

<sup>62</sup> Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 131–32.

### *Historical Hexagons (3)*

A regiment of Prussian infantry was sent against our left flank so as to support the one which was already attacking us from the front. It was already four o'clock [1600]. The attack was ferocious, but our troops contested it with so much courage and daring that it bogged down in the centre of the village. The defense was particularly desperate at the walled cemetery, and the Prussians were not able to take it despite receiving the support of a fresh infantry battalion. At length they were therefore forced to fall back with the aim of rallying their troops and reforming their columns of attack . . . Notwithstanding these successive checks, the Prussian First Corps returned to the attack for a third time, and at the cost of losses as terrible as their efforts were unprecedented, at length made themselves masters of village and cemetery alike.<sup>63</sup>

Similar experiences were recorded in respect of Plancenoit, but to add yet another eyewitness account would simply be to pile up words for no good reason.<sup>64</sup> What is more interesting is what the British observed of the conduct of the Prussians both during and after the battle. Basil Jackson, for example, was a young aide of Wellington's quartermaster general, William Howe de Lancey. Reaching La Belle Alliance at the climax of the battle as Ziethen's corps attacked the French from the vicinity of Papelotte, he found himself the witness of distressing scenes of cold-blooded murder.

Crossing to the left of the *chaussée* [roadway], I found myself involved with Prussian infantry streaming from the direction of Frischermont in no military order whatever as they swept onward bayoneting every wounded Frenchman they came upon. Seeing a knot of them standing close to a wall, I rode up and perceived

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<sup>63</sup> Hippolyte Mauduit, *Histoire des derniers jours de la grande armée ou souvenirs, documents et correspondance inédit de Napoléon en 1814 et 1815*, vol. 2 (Paris: Dion-Lambert, 1848), 66. For a detailed account of the Battle of Ligny, see Uffindell, *The Eagle's Last Triumph*, 91–115.

<sup>64</sup> For a description of the fighting, see Hofschröer, *1815: The Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 2, 116–24.



a wounded light dragoon sitting against it, and there seemed to be some hesitation as to his fate, when I called “Er ist ein Engländer” [He is English] upon which the men raised their bayonets and the poor fellow was saved.<sup>65</sup>

Similar scenes, meanwhile, were recorded by Sergeant Mauduit. As he wrote, “In this dreadful moment the Prussians’ rage burst forth against anyone wearing the uniform of the Old Guard: they gave no quarter to any of our comrades unfortunate enough to fall into their hands either as prisoners or simply men who had fallen prey to shot or cold steel. God above! There never was such a butchery, never such a massacre as that of which Plancenoit was the theatre in that last hour.”<sup>66</sup>

In the days after Waterloo, the violence continued unabated, the Prussian forces engaging not just in acts of pillage but also wholesale vandalism. For an eyewitness account, we have but to turn to the pages of then-captain Alexander Cavalié Mercer of the Royal Horse Artillery:

The village of Loures, where we arrived about noon, presented a horrid picture of devastation. A corps of Prussians halted there last night, and, excepting the walls of the houses, have utterly destroyed it. The doors and the windows [had been] torn out and consumed at the bivouac fire [while] a similar fate seems to have be-

<sup>65</sup> Robert Cooper Seaton, ed., *Notes and Reminiscences of a Staff Officer Chiefly Relating to the Waterloo Campaign and to St Helena Matters during the Captivity of Napoleon* (London: John Murray, 1903), 56. Another British observer was an ensign of the guards named Rhys Gronow: “We perceived, on entering France, that our allies the Prussians had committed fearful atrocities on the defenceless inhabitants of the villages and farms which lay in their line of march. Before we left La Belle Alliance, I had already seen the brutality of some of the Prussian infantry, who hacked and cut up all the cows and pigs which were in the farmyards. . . . On our line of march, whenever we arrived at towns or villages through which the Prussians had passed, we found that every article of furniture in the houses had been destroyed in the most wanton manner: looking glasses, mahogany bedsteads, pictures . . . and mattresses had been hacked, cut, half-burned and scattered about in every direction, and, on the slightest remonstrance of the wretched inhabitants, they were beaten in the most shameful manner and sometimes shot.” Nicolas Bentley, ed., *Selections from the Reminiscences of Captain Gronow* (London: Folio Society, 1977), 53.

<sup>66</sup> Mauduit, *Histoire des derniers jours de la Grande Armée*, vol. 2, 436–37.

### *Historical Hexagons (3)*

fallen furniture of every kind, except a few chairs, and even sofas, which the soldiers had reserved for their own use, and left standing about in the gardens and orchards, or, in some places, had given a parting kick to, for many had fallen forward on the embers of bivouac fires, and lay partially consumed. Clothes and household linen, beds, curtains and carpets, torn to rags, or half-burned, lay scattered about in all directions. The very road was covered with rags, feathers, fragments of broken furniture, earthenware, glass, etc. Large chests of drawers . . . stood about broken or burned. The very floors had been pulled up and the walls disfigured in every possible way. It [is] needless to add that no human being was to be seen amidst this desolation.<sup>67</sup>

This behavior, and especially the killing of wounded, was not normal in warfare in the more settled areas of Europe, and one is therefore led to conclude that the Prussian Army was driven by a spirit that was quite exceptional and speaks to an anti-Napoleonic fervor that buttressed its morale and determination alike. Such were the numbers available to the Prussians, meanwhile, that it is difficult not to believe that they could have overwhelmed the 70,000 men who might have been available to Napoléon had active operations continued in Belgium (it is assumed that at least 30,000 French troops would have had to be left behind to watch Antwerp). However, the Prussians were not on their own. Guarding the frontiers of the rest of France were no more than 73,000 troops. In theory, Jean Rapp had 23,000 men at Strasburg, Suchet had 23,000 men at Lyons, Claude-Jacques Lecourbe 8,000 men at Belfort, Brune 6,000 men at Marseilles, Charles-Mathieu-Isidore Decaen 7,000 men at Toulouse and, finally, Bertrand Clausel 6,000 men at Bayonne, but these figures should be regarded as maximums, while they included large numbers of National Guards who were for the most part useless when it came to field actions: the total of regular troops may well have been no great-

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<sup>67</sup> Gen Cavalié Mercer, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, UK: William the Blackwood and Sons, 1870), 57–58. Moving closer to Paris, the same author came across similar devastation at a place called Garges. Mercer, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 2, 71–72.

er than 50,000.<sup>68</sup> Not counting the Spaniards and Piedmontese, both of whom were mobilizing their forces, Napoléon would also have to contend with a first wave of 150,000 Austrians, Bavarians, Badeners, and Württembergers and 168,000 Russians, and we must therefore think about the quality of these forces too.<sup>69</sup>

Beginning with the Austrians, the disaster represented by the campaign of Ulm had led to a major process of organizational reform that had seen the introduction of the corps system, and thereby greatly strengthened the Habsburg army's resilience and flexibility alike: hence the greatly improved performance that had confronted Napoléon in the campaign of 1809, the consequence being that it had been the Austrians who had gained the honor of being the first troops to inflict defeat on the emperor in a field action (specifically at Aspern-Essling).<sup>70</sup> Other problems faced by the army had been tackled less effectively, but something had been done to address the issue of manpower by creating a reserve system that in theory allowed the rapid expansion of the infantry by some 40 percent on the outbreak of war.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, when this came in August 1812, the Austrian commander in chief, Karl von Schwarzenberg, who, though by no means a brilliant tactician, was to prove an able strategist and highly successful coalition general, promulgated new instructions for the conduct of battles that stressed the use of columns covered by large numbers of skirmishers both in attack and defense: clearly, it was recognized that to expect the raw recruits that comprised a large part of the Austrian forces to fight in line, as had been the

<sup>68</sup> Not counting the National Guard, there were another 25,000 troops engaged in internal security operations, particularly in the Vendée. For all this, see *Armies of Observation*, "Military Mobilisation during the Hundred Days," Wikipedia, accessed 21 July 2015.

<sup>69</sup> For reasons of space, attention will be confined to the Austrians and Russians. However, like the counterparts who served with Prussians on the Rhine, the troops from Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden were efficient enough and certainly capable of taking on such tasks as the blockade of fortresses.

<sup>70</sup> Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792–1814* (London: Batsford, 1982), 103–22.

<sup>71</sup> This feat was achieved by the addition of reserve battalions to infantry regiments that were only mobilized on the outbreak of war. In 1809, a landwehr had also been formed, but this experiment had been only partially successful, and no attempt was made to repeat it in 1813.

case in 1809, was simply unrealistic.<sup>72</sup> There remained, it is true, much to criticize, but the whitecoats who fought in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814 won a good opinion for themselves. "Individual Austrian battalions and squadrons fought with great skill," wrote one Prussian officer, while the British ambassador, Sir Charles Stuart, was positively euphoric in his assessment: "The composition of this army [i.e., Schwarzenberg's Army of Bohemia] was magnificent. Although I perceived a great many recruits . . . the system that reigned throughout, and the military air that marked the soldier, especially the Hungarian, must ever fix it in my recollection as the finest army of the continent."<sup>73</sup> As to the performance of these forces, these were mixed, but it was the Austrians who gained the day in the last major battle of the campaign at Arcis-sur-Aube on 20 March 1814, despite the fact that by then months of campaigning had left their forces seriously depleted.<sup>74</sup>

With such a record, there is no reason to suppose that the Austrians would not have been entirely capable of mopping up the scattered French forces that would have been facing them in 1815: admittedly, Rapp won a minor victory over part of the Austro-German Army of the Upper Rhine at La Souffel on 28 June, but sheer numbers forced the French to retire on Strasbourg nonetheless, while it is clear from Rapp's memoirs that he regarded his position as utterly hopeless.<sup>75</sup>

If the Austrians were solid, the Russians were still stronger. There is a tendency among Napoleonic military historians to see the Russian Army of the Napoleonic era as little more than an exer-

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<sup>72</sup> Appointed allied commander in chief in September 1813, Schwarzenberg earned many plaudits. As the highly respected military reformer Hermann von Boyen noted, "I would call the selection of Prince Schwarzenberg to be commander-in-chief not only of the Army of Bohemia, but of all the military forces, a special favour of destiny. As a commander he appeared to lack decision and wide vision, and he may well have depended more than was desirable upon the views of his associates, but his incalculable merit in the particular situation was not only to have borne with composure the presence of the three sovereigns and the numerous plans put forward by their staffs, and to have set them diplomatically aside, but also to have striven constantly to reconcile the most contradictory views." Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 82–83.

<sup>73</sup> Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> See Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries*, 187–90.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Rapp, *Memoirs of General Count Rapp, First Aide-de-Camp to Napoleon* (London: Henry Colburn, 1823), 357–74. It should also be noted that the Austrians very easily saw off Murat at the Battle of Tolentino.

cise in brute force, if not a veritable essay in military incompetence. However, recent research has suggested that this picture is greatly exaggerated. While no one could pretend that Alexander I's huge war machine was without its problems, during the period from 1796 to 1812, substantial military reforms under, first, Paul I, and, then, Alexander, had vastly improved the army's training, efficiency, and tactical abilities, while the terrible experiences of the campaigns of 1812–14 had honed its skills to a very high point indeed.<sup>76</sup> Even in 1813, indeed, foreign observers such as Sir Robert Wilson were impressed. While Wilson noted that the infantry were in a bad way on account of the terrible losses they had suffered, he did not hesitate to praise the other arms of service.

The regular heavy cavalry are undoubtedly very fine, the men gigantic, horses, good, equipments superior and in perfect condition. The light cavalry are less striking in point of horses and general appearance, but some of the hussars and lancers are good. The artillery seems particularly fine and well appointed.<sup>77</sup>

In short, the Russian Army was very tough and hard-hitting, while the general appointed to command the troops sent against France in 1815 was the very best commander that ever served Alexander I, Mikhail Bogdanovich, Prince Barclay de Tolly, a progressive figure who had masterminded many of the most important reforms that had been undertaken since the peace of Tilsit, planned the strategy that had brought Napoléon to grief in Russia and, having been temporarily displaced by political differences in the Russian court in 1812, shown himself to be a skilled tactician in the campaigns of 1813–14. Against a failing Napoléon, he would have been a formidable foe, and there therefore seems even less doubt that the Russians could have accomplished their part in the campaign with gusto.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Not the least of the improvements was the formation of a modern general staff on the Prussian model. For the reforms of the period prior to 1812, see Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814* (London: Penguin, 2009), 102–20. Useful as an overview, meanwhile, is Alexander Mikaberidze, “The Russian Army,” in Fremont-Barnes, *Armies of the Napoleonic Wars*, 36–56.

<sup>77</sup> As quoted in Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 66.

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed biography of Barclay, see Michael Josselson and Diana Josselson, *The Commander: A Life of Barclay de Tolly* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1980).

The prognosis, then, does not look very good. Napoléon was outnumbered by a factor of at least three to one and, with much of French public opinion firmly against him, unable to hope for much in the way of reinforcement, forced to rely on a set of generals who were scarcely the best that 23 years of near-incessant warfare had produced, and marching to war at the head of an army whose morale was distinctly questionable. Facing him, meanwhile, was a coalition that was unshakeable in its unity, free of the threat of revolt in its rear, possessed of resources that were near unlimited and determined to put an end to Napoléon once and for all. It was not a favorable combination, and in his heart of hearts the emperor knew it. No sooner, indeed, had the emperor's erstwhile private secretary, Claude-François de Ménéval, returned from Vienna than his master was confessing to him that he already felt himself to be half-beaten.

Generally speaking, the subjects of the emperor's conversation . . . were serious and seemed to affect him painfully. He rarely dropped a grave way of speaking . . . All his words were stamped with a calm sadness and a resignation which produced a great impression on me. I no longer found him animated with that certainty of success which had formerly rendered him confident and invincible. It seemed as if his faith in his fortune, which had induced him to attempt the very hardy enterprise of his return from the island of Elba, and which had supported him during his miraculous march through France, had abandoned him on his entry into Paris. He felt that he was no longer seconded with the ardent and devoted zeal to which he was accustomed, and that, hampered as he was with the shackles which he had allowed to be placed upon him, he was no longer as free as formerly.<sup>79</sup>

Turning to the issue of wargaming, it is, of course, impossible to recreate the state of mind of Napoléon or anyone else. All we can think about, then, are material factors such as geography, deployment, and

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<sup>79</sup> Ménéval, *Memoirs to serve for the History of Napoleon I from 1803 to 1815*, vol. 3, 443-46.

armed strength. For the purposes of the exercise of testing out what would have occurred in the event of French success at Waterloo, far fewer packages are available than they are for the tactical and operational levels of warfare, and, of these, with the exception of one only, namely the Avalon Hill offering, *War and Peace*, all of them are concerned with reproducing the ebb and flow of the campaigns that gripped Europe from 1803 to 1815 rather than giving players the opportunity to focus on particular episodes thereof.<sup>80</sup> That being the case, it is perforce to *War and Peace* that we must turn. This, however, is no hardship; far from it, indeed. While the game system is a little cumbersome, it reflects many crucial aspects of Napoleonic warfare, a good example being the linked issues of campaign wastage and the importance of field armies marching in separate formations but fighting together, and generally delivers plausible results: just as Napoléon has a hard job losing the campaign of 1805, he has a hard job winning those of 1812, 1813, and 1814. If the French, as already noted, have almost no chance of winning the 1815 scenario, it is only to be expected.<sup>81</sup>

Before going any further, however, let us first look at some of the fundamental features of the package. To begin with the contending forces, these are represented by strength points, each of which stands for 5,000 men, the counters being further differentiated by nationality (in this case, to name the most important, French, British, Austrian, Russian, and Prussian), along with type (i.e., infantry, cavalry, or partisans) and quality (i.e., elite, regular, and militia). No attempt, then, is made to recreate specific army corps, let alone divisions or brigades, articulation rather being achieved through a myriad of individual commanders ranging from Wellington, Napoléon, and Blücher to less prominent figures such as the Prince of Orange, Suchet, and Friedrich von Kleist, some of them highly effective in terms of their impact on combat and others much less so, strength

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<sup>80</sup> For a list of 10 such games, see Robert Carroll, “Top 10 Strategic Napoleonic Games,” *BoardGameGeek.com*, 20 April 2012.

<sup>81</sup> The Hundred Days scenario is set to start in June 1815. That said, despite the fact that the events concerned were over and done with by the end of May, it makes provision for coverage of the last-ditch attempt of Joachim Murat to maintain himself on the throne of Naples, the only conclusion that one can draw from this being that the designers felt the need to do something, however ineffectual, to boost Napoléon’s chances of success.

points being assigned to each of the personalities concerned in accordance with the stipulations attached to each scenario, and, most importantly, for the most part being unable to move on their own account.<sup>82</sup> As for other key matters, meanwhile, each hexagon represents an area of ground measuring some 64 kilometers from side to side and each turn one month.<sup>83</sup>

Turning to the relevant scenario, we find that, at the start of the game, Napoléon has access to 41 strength points of infantry and cavalry, or, in round terms some 205,000 men, of which just 23 are available for an immediate invasion of Belgium, and the allies 560,000 made up of 60 Austrian strength points, 20 British (including 7 representing various Dutch and German troops attached to Wellington's forces), and 32 Prussian.<sup>84</sup> To put it mildly, then, the French player is confronted by an enormous task, and, like Napoléon, can attempt to make headway against the allies either by adopting a defensive posture and attempting to avoid a decisive battle long enough to build up his strength to a more respectable level, or to take the offensive and strike hard and fast against the nearest available target, namely the Prussian and Anglo-Dutch armies occupying Belgium. The one French advantage being that at the start of the game the allied forces are spread all the way from the North Sea to central Italy, it is the lat-

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<sup>82</sup> It is notable that, for the purposes of the scenario, Napoléon's health is evidently regarded as being perfectly good: at all events, his command rating is his usual three as opposed to the two or even one that might be felt to be more appropriate.

<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed description of the games system, including a brief account of such matters as the resolution of individual battles, see War and Peace review "War and Peace," Reviews, Forums, BoardGameGeek.com, accessed 23 April 2022.

<sup>84</sup> In addition to these starting forces, so long as they control Paris and Lyons, the French also have the benefit of five strength points of reinforcements each move, while an allied invasion of France is deemed immediately to precipitate the outbreak of partisan warfare, a phenomenon represented by the deployment of two strength-points of irregulars anywhere in the country. Even if they are to some extent counterbalanced by the fact that the latter can in practice achieve relatively little, these provisions can only be deemed to be, at best, extremely optimistic, and, at worst, downright wrong-headed, while it will also be noted that the massive insurrection that the return of Napoléon sparked off in the Vendée is completely ignored. As for the allies, meanwhile, the Austrians, British, and Prussians can together count on a minimum of 6 strength-points of reinforcements per turn, not to mention the arrival in southern Germany in Turn 3 (August) of no fewer than 28 strength-points of Russians.



ter option that most such people will adopt, and it is in fact with this move that the refight that we will now detail begins.<sup>85</sup>

To proceed, then, the first move saw the Army of the North cross the Belgian frontier and inflict heavy losses on the Anglo-Dutch forces, who were driven back on Brussels. So far, so good, but elsewhere things were far less rosy, Blücher being left free to concentrate the whole of his Army of the Lower Rhine at Namur and Kleist's Army of the Moselle to cross the border into France and besiege Metz. The following month, Napoléon inflicted a heavy defeat on the combined forces of Wellington and Blücher southwest of Brussels, but, once again, success in one area was countered by setbacks elsewhere in the form of the loss of Metz to Kleist and Strasbourg to the first Austrian troops to cross the frontier. Finally, August saw yet another victory for the emperor over Wellington and Blücher, although this did no more than force the former to take refuge behind the fortifications of Brussels and the latter to fall back on Liège, where he was promptly reinforced by a significant number of fresh troops that had been dispatched from the rear, in the meantime there being nothing whatsoever to prevent the Austrians from pushing deep into Burgundy under Schwarzenberg, a move that the emperor was forced to counter by establishing a new army at Rheims. Only in the Alps, then, was there any genuinely unalloyed good news in the form of a bungled attack on Geneva by Field Marshal Heinrich von Bellegarde that was beaten off with heavy losses.

It was now September, and even Napoléon could see that Paris—the loss of which was deemed to mean immediate defeat for the French—was in serious danger. Hastening south, he therefore joined Davout at Rheims, and, with his aid, inflicted a heavy defeat on Schwarzenberg, who was forced to withdraw to Belfort, only for this success to be short-lived: not only did the first Russian forces appear on the scene under the capable Barclay de Tolly, pick up Schwarzenberg's battered army, and drive the emperor back across the Aisne, but Blücher stormed Rheims and Bellegarde Grenoble. With the onset of

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<sup>85</sup> Out of interest, the author included the historically anachronistic campaign of Murat in the proceedings (this commander's attempt to support Napoléon was over and done with a full month before the emperor invaded Belgium). However, other than tying down a small number of Austrian troops, this had no effect on the campaign as a whole, and will in consequence be ignored in these pages.

ever worsening weather, the allied forces were struck by serious outbreaks of disease, but it was becoming difficult to see how Napoléon could possibly prevail. Nevertheless, hoping, perhaps, for a miracle, the French ruler fought on, though the fact that he was now confronted by three powerful opponents—Barclay de Tolly, Schwarzenberg, and Blücher—any one of whom were in a position to march on Paris while he was engaged elsewhere, meant that he had little option but fall back on the capital, while summoning the reserves that had been gathering at Lyons under Marshal Ney to his assistance. As the allies found when they closed in toward the end of the month, meanwhile, he was still a dangerous opponent, an advance on Paris at odds of almost four to one being beaten off in a fierce battle on the river Marne.

Napoléon, then, could still win battles, while in early November his position was temporarily somewhat improved by the safe arrival of the troops he had sent for from Lyons. However, it was all too clear that no more help was to be expected from the provinces, for Barclay and Schwarzenberg now maneuvered their armies to block all access to Paris from the south and west, the fact being that, with Blücher and a revitalized Wellington menacing the capital from the north, the emperor was very close to being trapped. So strong, meanwhile, were the allied armies that they were unafraid to take him on at close quarters, a series of climactic battles seeing the French just manage to cling on to their positions at the cost of half their strength. Ravaged though the allied forces were by disease, the only realistic chance for Napoléon now was to surrender in the hope that, by bringing the slaughter to an early end, he could secure a degree of clemency that was otherwise looking less and less likely. However, increasingly locked into a state of mind that would far in the future be termed as a *bunker mentality*, the emperor took refuge in dreams and illusions, rambling at one instant about how those few French commanders still at large in the provinces, including, most notably, Marshal Soult, would any day succeed in raising the people of France against the invaders and march to his relief, and at the next about how a still undefeated Joachim Murat would assuredly at the very least force Schwarzenberg to march to restore the situation in Italy. Such dreams, however, were not proof against reality, a month of furious fighting in bitter winter weather seeing the remains of his forces first driven back within the walls of Paris and then subjected to a

blockade that had soon reduced army and populace alike to the brink of starvation. This was the end: terrified that the mob would burst out in revolt and tear him limb from limb—not for nothing had he been an eyewitness of the storming of the Tuileries in August 1792—on the very last day of the year, the emperor presented himself before the allied pickets at Saint Cloud and proffered his sword to a triumphant, but grim-faced Schwarzenberg (grim-faced, because there was no mercy; whereas a month before, Napoléon might have secured exile to Saint Helena, the sufferings inflicted on all and sundry in the course of the past month ensured that the very harshest counsels among the allied leadership would now prevail), the freezing dawn of the Feast of the Epiphany therefore seeing “Monsieur Bonaparte” brought before a Prussian firing squad just a few yards from the spot where the unfortunate Louis-Antoine-Henri de Bourbon-Condé, Duke of Enghien, had met his end just 12 years before.

What would really have happened to Napoléon had he been taken alive in such a situation belongs, of course, to the realm of complete speculation, but what is much less clear is his capacity to have extracted any better a result in military terms from even significant success in Belgium in the first weeks of the campaign than the one laid out here: no matter how many battles he won, the allied powers were not going to let him rule in France, while they had so many troops that, even with the emperor given all the benefits of the doubt accorded him by the designers of War and Peace, including the highly implausible assumption that the army, the notables, and the populace alike would have backed him to the bitter end, the odds against him were just too great, and the chances of avoiding being trapped in Paris—the one place that he dared not surrender—therefore all but nonexistent. At the strategic level, then, to test out the hopes and dreams that have, since 1815, swirled around the events of the Hundred Days by means of historical simulation is, short of some miracle of the sort that might have saved Napoléon—the equivalent, say, of throwing an unbroken succession of double-sixes stretching into infinity—to see them crumble into dust.

*Historical Hexagons (3)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

The initial deployment of the rival forces in the 1815 scenario of Avalon Hill's War and Peace.

Chapter 7



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

War and Peace, the situation at the end of July 1815.

### Historical Hexagons (3)

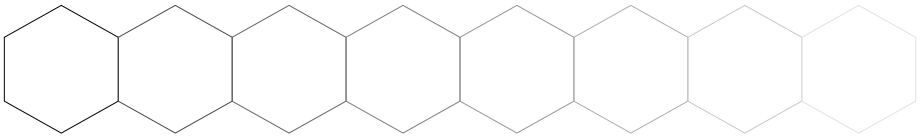


*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
War and Peace, September 1815. Though Napoléon remains dominant in Belgium, Schwarzenberg has led an Austrian Army deep into Burgundy while the Russians have reached the Rhine.

Chapter 7



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*  
War and Peace, November 1815. Napoléon has been forced to retreat to Paris and is menaced from all sides.



## Chapter 8

# Historical Hexagons (4)

### *Fantasy*

Lying flat on the ground a few yards in the rear of the ridgeline in a desperate attempt to shelter from the rounds of canister being discharged every few minutes by the French guns posted in the lee of the battered farm barely 200 yards away, not to mention the roundshot shrieking in from the enemy batteries out in the valley beyond, the weary redcoats raised their heads and looked at one another. Amid the deafening cacophony of battle, it was impossible to exchange a word even with a man's nearest neighbor, but the questioning looks on the men's faces told their own story. One and all, they had sensed it as much as heard it, a dull, reverberating rhythm that somehow penetrated the cannonade and caused the ground to tremble beneath their mud-smeared knees and elbows. A few more seconds ticked by, and now it was unmistakable: the tramp of thousands of booted feet and the rolling of hundreds of drums. A-rum-dum! A-rum-dum! A-rummadum, rumma-dum, dum-dum! "Old Trousers," croaked a grizzled veteran. "It's 'Old Trousers.'" Instinctively, the men reached for their muskets and pulled them closer, checking that the edges of the flints that set off their charges were still sharp and scraping away the crusted powder from touch holes and priming pans. They would, they knew, be facing the enemy very soon.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> History does not relate how or why the French *pas de charge* acquired this nickname in the British Army, but so it did. The account of the climax of the Battle of Waterloo that follows is entirely fictional. In fact, the guard did not attack for a further 90 minutes, by which time, the Prussian IV Corps was on the verge of breaking into the vital village of Plancenoit in the French right rear, and the Prussian I Corps just about to advance from Papelotte directly on Napoléon's headquarters at La Belle Alliance. Still



Approximately 0.8 km away, the French infantry came inexorably onward. In all, there were 12 battalions, 7 of chasseurs and 5 of grenadiers, all of them crack troops who had seen much service in the campaigns of 1812–14 and some of them in the long war in Spain and Portugal as well, while initially they were headed by the emperor himself, the latter having left his command post near La Belle Alliance to spur them on. An eyewitness was an officer of Napoléon's personal staff named Octave Levassasseur, who had just arrived back at La Belle Alliance fresh from a mission on which he had been sent to spread the entirely false news that the Prussians had come.

Just then, the emperor rode past me followed by his officers. . . . Arriving before the Guard, he said, "Follow me!"; and led them down that road swept by a hundred pieces of artillery. Immediately behind him came 150 bandsmen playing the triumphal marches heard on the [Place du] Carrousel. Very soon the road was covered with the guardsmen marching in serried ranks in the wake of the emperor: the cannon balls and spherical case that raked it bestrewed it with dead and

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worse, 2 battalions were left behind as a reserve, while the 10 battalions that did make the final charge fanned out into three separate echelons and struck Wellington's line at different points in a manner that rendered defeat a virtual certainty. That said, in the sector immediately to the west of the famous crossroads, the situation was still bad enough, despite the fact that it was only hit by five battalions. Thus, the brigades of Col Ernst von Vincke, Kielmansegg, and Ompteda were routed, that of Halkett thrown into considerable disorder, and the Nassauers and Brunswickers driven back pretty much in the manner described, the fact being that the only force to which real injustice has been done is Chassé's Dutch (though it is, of course, admitted that the exploits of Maitland's guards and Adam's light infantry have necessarily had to be omitted, these having taken place in the vicinity of Hougomont). At the same time, of course, it was not Wellington who lost his leg, but rather Uxbridge. For a recent analysis, see Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: The Defeat of Napoleon's Imperial Guard: Henry Clinton, the 2nd Division and the End of a 200-Year-Old Controversy* (Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2015). As to what actually happened, the repulse of the Guard caused the whole of the French left wing to dissolve in panic, whereupon Wellington ordered such troops of his center-right as remained intact forward in a great counterattack that in a few minutes had reached La Belle Alliance. However, the triumph was shared by the Prussians: at precisely the same moment, IV Corps finally drove the French from Plancenoit, while I Corps struck diagonally into the heart of the French center-right, it being these movements that ensured that the rout of the French became general.

wounded. A few paces more and Napoleon would have been alone at their head.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of their uniforms, for the most part hastily assembled especially for the campaign from drafts contributed by other units, they were a motley crew—only a handful wore the famous bearskins of the Old Guard, the remainder sporting battered shakos or even forage caps—but, having thus far sat out the battle safely in the rear, they were some of the freshest troops on the field, while to the last man they were dedicated to the emperor. As they crossed the valley bottom, meanwhile, they had glimpsed cavalry forming up to support them, the fact that they were followed by a battery of horse artillery doing even more to boost their confidence. It was a wonderful moment; even the wounded strewn on the slopes of the French ridge and in the valley bottom dragging themselves to their knees to cheer and wave as they passed. The recollections of Hippolyte Mauduit recount,

Formed in columns of attack by echelon with two guns loaded with canister positioned in the intervals between them, each one of them firmly supported by all the rest, these [twelve] battalions set out to attack the enemy. Headed by Comte Friant, the first battalion of the Third Grenadiers took as its alignment the left-hand verge of the main road, while the other units followed *au pas de charge* in the best of orders, taking care to maintain their proper distances. . . . Meeting with Marshal Ney near the farm [of La Haye Sainte] the emperor gave him command of the column which already possessed such commanders as Lieutenant-Generals Friant, Roguet and Michel, Brigadiers Cambronne, Poret de Morvan and Harlet, and Colonel Michel. . . . One and all, they marched . . . to repeated cries of “Vive l’empereur!”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P. Beslay, ed., *Un officier d’état-major sous le Premier Empire: Souvenirs militaires d’Octave Levassesseur, officier d’artillerie, aide de camp du Maréchal Ney, 1802–1815* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1914), 304. The effect of the allied artillery is clearly exaggerated for effect.

<sup>3</sup> Hippolyte de Mauduit, *Histoire des derniers jours de la Grande Armée ou souvenirs, correspondance et documents inédites de Napoléon en 1814 et 1815*, vol. 2 (Paris: Dion-

Nor were the guard on their own. Spurred on by Marshal Ney, whom one French officer glimpsed galloping along the line shouting, “Courage! The army is victorious: the enemy is beaten at every point!” not to mention the efforts of Levavasseur, the weary men of the corps of Generals Reille and Drouet gathered themselves for one last effort, and pressed forward in the hope that they might at least tie down the defenders and prevent them from moving to the threatened sector.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest here is the remark of Mauduit of the 1st Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard: “Comte Reille [*sic*] received orders to form all the men of his corps who were disposable in column to the right of the wood of Goumont [i.e., Hougomont] without delay and to advance upon the enemy.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, officers

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Lambert, 1848), 418–19. It is worth offering a word of explanation here about the organization of the Imperial Guard in 1815. Some 19,000 strong in the campaign of Waterloo, this consisted of infantry, artillery, and cavalry and was split into three sections—the so-called Young, Middle, and Old Guards, of which the first consisted of infantry only, the second of infantry and cavalry, and the third of all three. Of these troops, however, only some of the infantry and artillery were involved in the final attack, including (in this fictional account), specifically, one battalion of the 1st Regiment of Grenadiers à Pied; one battalion of the 2d Regiment of Grenadiers à Pied; one battalion of the 1st Regiment of Chasseurs à Pied; two battalions of the 2d Regiment of Chasseurs à Pied and one battery of the Horse Artillery of the Guard (all Old Guard) and two battalions of the 3d Regiment of Grenadiers à Pied; one battalion of the 4th Regiment of Grenadiers à Pied; two battalions of the 3d Regiment of Chasseurs à Pied; and two battalions of the 4th Regiment of Chasseurs à Pied (all Middle Guard). For a sumptuously illustrated analysis, see P. Juhel, *La Garde Impériale pendant les Cent-Jours, 1815: De l'île d'Elbe à Waterloo* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Napoléon, 2008). According to the account presented by Gen Antoine Drouot to the House of Peers on 22 June, the attack was to be seconded by the whole of such cavalry as remained to the guard, but, like the rest of the French horse, the guard's four regiments had been used up in the earlier mounted attacks, and it is difficult to know how much they could actually have achieved at this stage. Lucien Bonaparte, *La vérité sur les cent jours* (Paris: Chez Ladvocat, 1835), 140.

<sup>4</sup> That the intention was a general assault is confirmed by Philippe le Doucet de Pontécoulant, an officer of the foot artillery of the guard who was very close to Napoléon at the crucial moment and later wrote a detailed account of the campaign. “He [i.e., Napoléon] ordered all the troops of the First Corps . . . to resume their positions . . . while on our left General Reille was instructed to form his entire corps in column of attack . . . and overcome the extreme right of the [Anglo-Dutch] line with the bayonet.” Gustave le Doucet de Pontécoulant, *Souvenirs militaire: Napoléon à Waterloo, 1815, ou précis rectifié de la campagne de 1815 avec des documents nouveaux et des pièces inédites*, ed. C. Bourachot (Paris: Éditions Caza, 2007), 252–53.

<sup>5</sup> Mauduit, *Derniers jours de la Grande Armée*, vol. 2, 417. The officer who remembered seeing Ney was Capt Pierre Robinaux of the 2d Line, who had spent the entire day

stationed on the Anglo-Dutch left wing also reported the French opposed to them as being on the move. As Kevan Leslie, in 1815 a lieutenant in the 79th Foot, wrote to William Siborne, “At the period to which you allude, the enemy in front of us seemed [to be] moving forward a fresh column for a simultaneous attack to that on the right of our line.”<sup>6</sup> Finally, John Kincaid of the 1st Battalion of the 95th Rifles noted that just at this point the French infantry who had been holding the knoll across the road from La Haye Sainte since just after the latter’s capture made a charge that carried them to within 20 yards of the hedge behind which the riflemen were now sheltering and then engaged in a fierce firefight.<sup>7</sup>

Just shy of La Haye Sainte, the column veered off the high road and headed into the corpse-strewn fields to the left. That said, the French commanders did not seek to ascend the broad watershed to the left, but rather kept to the hollow occupied by the farm, thereby protecting themselves from the flanking fire that would otherwise have come their way from the troops holding the crest of the ridge above Hougoumont.<sup>8</sup> Shells and roundshot thinned their ranks, while Marshal Ney, who had ridden forward to take personal charge of the attack, had his fifth horse of the day killed from under him; but still the infantry kept going, sensing, perhaps, that the rate of fire from the British guns was dropping away: despite Wellington’s

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fighting in the vicinity of Hougoumont. See G. Schlumberger, ed., *Journal du route du Capitaine Robiniaux, 1803–1832* (Paris: n.p., 2009), 180. Meanwhile, much confusion surrounds the name of Gen Drouet, who in many accounts appears either as Drouet d’Erlon or D’Erlon. The confusion arises from the fact that the then-Jean-Baptiste Drouet was ennobled by Napoléon as Comte d’Erlon in January 1809. It being the practice of the author to refer to Napoléon’s commanders not by their titles but rather their surnames (so Ney rather than Prince de la Moskowa and Soult rather than the Duc de Dalmacie), the form used in this work will be Drouet. However, care should be taken to avoid confusion with the Gen Antoine Drouot who commanded the Imperial Guard.

<sup>6</sup> K. Leslie to W. Siborne, in H. T. Siborne, ed., *Waterloo Letters: A Selection from Original and Hitherto Unpublished Letters Bearing on the Operations of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth of June 1815* (London: Cassell, 1891), 356.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Kincaid to W. Siborne, 2 May 1839, in Siborne, *Waterloo Letters*, 266.

<sup>8</sup> At its highest point, the watershed is actually higher than the ridge held by Wellington, for example, Mercer telling us that enemy cavalry falling back from his position were soon covered by a “swell in the ground.” See Cavalié Mercer, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign Kept throughout the Campaign of 1815*, vol. 1 (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1870), 316.

strictures against wasteful long-distance counterbattery fire, some batteries were running short of ammunition while others had been shot to pieces.<sup>9</sup> Among these last was the Royal Horse Artillery unit commanded by Captain Cavalié Mercer.

We suddenly became sensible of a most destructive flanking fire from a battery which had come, the Lord knows how, and established itself on a knoll somewhat higher than the ground we stood on, and only about 400 or 500 yards a little in advance of our left flank. The rapidity and precision of this fire were quite appalling. Every shot, almost, took effect, and I certainly expected we should all be annihilated. Our horses and limbers, being a little retired down the slope, had hitherto been somewhat under cover from the direct fire in front, but this plunged right amongst them, knocking them down by pairs and creating horrible confusion. Then drivers could hardly extricate themselves from one dead horse before another fell or, perhaps, themselves. The saddle-bags in many instances were torn from the horses' backs and their contents scattered over the field. One shell I saw explode under the two finest wheel horses in the troop: down they dropped. . . . The whole livelong day had cost us nothing like this. Our gunners too—the few left fit for duty of them—were so exhausted that they were unable to run the guns up after firing; consequently, at every round they

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<sup>9</sup> Much controversy has been generated by the question of the performance of Wellington's artillery during the battle. After the battle, Wellington seems to have been convinced that he had been let down by his gunners and famously made scant reference to them in the Waterloo dispatch. How far this was justified is unclear, but what does seem to be the case is that at some time between 1700 and 1800 two batteries posted overlooking the dell immediately west of La Haye Sainte were pulled out of the line on the pretext, genuine or otherwise, of replenishing their ammunition. Still worse, at around the same time two other batteries stationed in the vicinity of La Haye Sainte were pulled out to reinforce the slopes above Hougomont. All that was left to defend the sector now attacked by the Guard, then, were the batteries of Ross, Gardiner, Cleaves, and Lloyd, all of which had been more or less shot up: Ross's battery, for example, had lost three of its six guns and Gardiner's at least one other. See Nick Lipscombe, *Wellington's Guns: The Untold Story of Wellington and His Artillery in the Peninsula and at Waterloo* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2013), 372–82.

retreated closer to the limbers. . . . The fire continued on both sides, mine becoming slacker and slacker, for we . . . were so reduced that all our strength was barely sufficient to load and fire three guns out of our six.<sup>10</sup>

The fact was that even as it was, Wellington's army was already in severe trouble. Following the fall of La Haye Sainte at around 1800, the French had brought up a battery of artillery—the very guns, in fact, that did such damage to Mercer's battery—and positioned it astride the main road, while elements of the units that had stormed the farm crept forward and subjected the defenders to a heavy fire of musketry. Captain John Kincaid was with the first battalion of the 95th Rifles just a few yards away across the main road.

The loss of La Haye Sainte was of the most serious consequence as it afforded the enemy an establishment within our position. They immediately brought up two guns on our side of it and began serving out some grape to us. . . . For the two or three succeeding hours, there was no variety with us but one continued blaze of musketry. The smoke hung so thick about that, although not more than eighty yards asunder, we could only distinguish each other by the flashes of the pieces. A good many of our guns had been disabled and a great number more rendered unserviceable in consequence of the unprecedented close fighting. . . . I felt weary and worn out, less from fatigue than anxiety. Our division, which had stood upwards of 5,000 strong at the commencement of the battle, had gradually dwindled down into a solitary line of skirmishers. The Twenty-Seventh regiment were lying literally dead in square a few yards behind us. . . . I had never yet heard of a battle in which all were killed, but this seemed likely to be an exception as all were going by turns.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mercer, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign Kept throughout the Campaign of 1815*, vol. 1, 325–30.

<sup>11</sup> Capt J. Kincaid, *Adventures in the Rifle Brigade in the Peninsula, France, and the Netherlands from 1809 to 1815* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1830), 341–42. Amid the roll-

Kincaid's fears, of course, were not fulfilled: even in the units that were hardest hit, plenty of men survived to claim the famous Waterloo medal. That said, the hour or so following the fall of La Haye Sainte was a grim time for the riflemen. The initial commander of the battalion, Colonel Andrew Francis Barnard, was wounded by a sniper ensconced in the garden; his replacement, Major Alexander Cameron, soon after was taken to the rear following a severe wound to the neck; and Lieutenants Johnston and Simmons were both shot down as the battalion evacuated the sandpit that was its initial position, yet another officer who may have been hit at this time being Captain Edward Henry Chawner.<sup>12</sup>

To return to the oncoming French, in front were four battalions of chasseurs, behind them three battalions of grenadiers, and, finally, behind them again, a third echelon consisting of two battalions of grenadiers and three of chasseurs. Unusually, no chain of skirmishers marched ahead of the columns: instead, all was to be risked on one desperate burst of speed and energy designed to break through an enemy line that was clearly on its knees. Indeed, never had such a gambit been more necessary. For the past two hours, more and more Prussians had been debouching onto the field, and, having forced back the troops who had initially sought to block their progress, they were now attempting to storm the village of Plancenoit deep in the French right rear. The Young Guard having been sent to deal with this problem, along with two battalions of the Old Guard, there was every reason to hope that the newcomers would be fought to a stand-

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ing clouds of smoke, Kincaid was seemingly only aware of those guns actually facing him, but it is unlikely that a mere section—i.e., two guns—would have been acting on its own. For an even more dramatic account of the situation in the Anglo-Dutch center, we might turn to the chief of staff of the 2d Netherlands Division, Pieter van Zuylen van Nyevelt: “The enemy started attacking again. Its artillery was advanced and hurled death and terror into our ranks. Our losses rapidly increased: already no reserve existed, all [having] been pushed ahead. . . . The attack was most violent: entire battalions were destroyed and replaced by others. . . . The slightest advantages of terrain . . . which in other circumstances would not even have been noticed, were the object of fights upon which was expended the courage of a lion.” P. van Zuylen van Nyevelt to J. V. Constant de Rebecque, 25 October 1815, in John Franklin, ed., *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence* (Ulverston, UK: 1815 Limited, 2010), 56–57.

<sup>12</sup> George Caldwell and Robert Cooper, *Rifle Green at Waterloo: An Account of the 95th Foot in the Netherlands Campaign of 1813–1814*, rev. ed. (Leicester, UK: Bugle Horn, 2015), 57.

still, but Napoléon saw all too clearly that this was not a moment for finesse and had therefore ordered Ney to press home his assault without delay. As the latter later remembered, “Around [six] o’clock in the evening General Charles de la Bédoyère came to me and told me on behalf of the emperor that Marshal Grouchy was arriving on our right and attacking the left wing of the united British and Prussian armies. . . . A little while afterwards I saw four regiments of the Middle Guard coming up in my direction headed by the emperor himself. The latter wanted me to renew the attack by forcing the enemy centre, and ordered me to place myself at their head alongside General Friant.”<sup>13</sup>

On the ridge above La Haye Sainte, the few officers of the waiting troops who still possessed horses stared down from the ridgeline in consternation at the oncoming columns. Behind them, their men were still hugging the ground, but a certain shuffling was evident in their ranks; clearly, they were nervous and ill at ease. At a sign from the battalion commanders, the sergeants got the men on their feet and started putting them through the manual of arms in a desperate

<sup>13</sup> M. Ney to J. Fouché, 26 June 1815, in Raymond B. Maiseau, *Vie du Maréchal Ney, Duc d’Elchingen, Prince de la Moskowa* (Paris: Chez P. J. de Mat, 1816), 180. See also Address of General Drouot to the House of Peers, 23 June 1815, in Bonaparte, *La vérité sur les cent jours*, 140. From this we learn that the guard were to “march upon the enemy and overcome all those who resisted with the bayonet.” That Napoléon should have attempted precisely the sort of maneuver depicted here was very much the opinion of contemporary French analysts. Here, for example, is the view of Gen Frédéric Guillaume de Vaudoncourt, the editor of the prestigious *Journal des Sciences Militaires*: “The Second Corps had been checked in front of the chateau of Goumont [i.e., Hougomont], around which it had become somewhat bogged down. Meanwhile, although Marshal Ney was holding out at La Haye Sainte, he had not been able to advance a single pace from the position which he was occupying: all he had had been able to do, indeed, was to secure his gains with those troops that he had at his disposal. In this situation, the course of action that Napoleon ought to have adopted was to capitalise on the suspension of Bülow’s attack [on Plancenoit] by launching a massive blow on the [Anglo-Dutch] centre. To achieve success in this respect, what was needed was to have the Second Corps and the whole disposable force of the Guard move on the plateau beyond La Haye Sainte with the utmost rapidity. To succeed, however, this attack would have had to be concluded before seven o’clock. . . . Despite the losses that had suffered by Second Corps in the course of the day, Napoleon could by these means have concentrated 18,000 men to the left of La Haye Sainte. Given that the Duke of Wellington had no more reserves to send into the line, when the Prussian corps of Gen Ziethen arrived on the battlefield at 1930, it would have been confronted, even swept away, by a mass of fugitives.” Frédéric Guillaume de Vaudoncourt, *Histoire des campagnes de 1814 et 1815 en France*, vol. 4 (Paris: Chez Avril de Gastel, 1826), 74–75.



attempt to steady their nerves, but each movement saw more men fall to roundshot, shell, or canister, and the gaps in the ranks were becoming ever harder to fill. Unfortunately, the defenders were for the most part not seasoned redcoats of the sort that had repulsed the corps of General Drouet earlier in the day on the other side of battlefield in the famous action that culminated in the great charge of the Household and Union Brigades. Beside the high road and therefore directly above La Haye Sainte stood the sad remnant of the brigade of Ompteda: a King's German Legion formation, this was in itself a force of high quality, but over the course of the day it had been used most cruelly. Thus, of its four battalions, the 2d Light had constituted the original garrison of La Haye Sainte and had within the past hour finally been driven from its buildings in some disorder, having lost some 200 casualties, while the 5th and 8th Line had both been terribly cut up by French cavalry when the Prince of Orange had misguidedly ordered them to attempt to drive the French from their gains, the second of these episodes having cost the life of none other than Ompteda himself; other than a handful of men in the farm who had escaped the massacre at the hands of the enemy cavalry, all that was left, then, was the 1st Light, and even that had seen two of its companies suffer heavy losses when they were sent to the help of their fellow riflemen.<sup>14</sup>

If Ompteda's brigade was now little short of being a broken reed, the two other formations in the sector most threatened by the guard had scarcely attained the status of a reed in the first place, both of them being made up of very raw troops with little experience or training. Thus, first came the 5th Hanoverian Brigade under Colonel Vincke, a fresh unit brought over in haste from the left flank, but this was composed entirely of militiamen or landwehr and had lost two of its four battalions when an order to withdraw to a position of greater safety a few hundred yards in rear of the ridge was, or so it seems, deliberately misunderstood by their officers as a means of marching off the battlefield altogether.<sup>15</sup> And, finally, a little farther to the west

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<sup>14</sup> For the travails that befell Ompteda's brigade, see Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: Myth and Reality* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2014), 161–63.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew W. Field, *Wellington's Waterloo Allies: How Soldiers from Brunswick, Hanover, Nassau and the Netherlands Contributed to the Victory of 1815* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2022), 136. Like many senior officers of the Hanoverian contingent,

came the 1st Hanoverian brigade of Kielmansegg, this consisting of three landwehr battalions, two light battalions, and a rifle company.<sup>16</sup> The record of this force was somewhat better in that they had stood their ground all day under heavy fire, but the result had been terrible casualties, not least when a lucky French cannonball had struck down an entire face of the square formed by the Bremen and Verden battalions, while another battalion had been lost earlier in the day, when it had been sent down into the valley to clear the west face of La Haye Sainte, only to be destroyed by French cavalry. Something of the plight in which the brigade found itself is conveyed in the report submitted after the battle by its commander.

The enemy cavalry reformed again . . . and sent a mass of skirmishers ahead to lure us into firing our weapons: they cost us some losses in our squares. The enemy then advanced two light artillery pieces to several hundred paces before the left square under the cover of infantry and cuirassiers.<sup>17</sup> We had no means to defend ourselves against the murderous fire of case shot because our artillery had been out of ammunition for some time and was therefore sent to the rear. . . . At this time . . . the lieutenant colonel commanding the [Bremen Field Battalion], the brigade major and many officers and men had been killed or wounded.<sup>18</sup>

Beside Kielmansegg's men came the only British troops in the area, namely the left wing of the brigade commanded by Halkett. This was yet another force that was in a bad way. Caught in line by French cav-

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Vincke was desperately inexperienced, having retired from the Hanoverian Army when it was disbanded in 1803, and even never having commanded more than a company. Of his four battalion commanders, meanwhile, two were no better off than he was, and the other two possessed no military experience whatsoever. Field, *Wellington's Waterloo Allies*, 96–97.

<sup>16</sup> Like Vincke, Kielmansegg had seen only limited service in that he had retired from his commission as a captain in the Hanoverian Army in 1803 and only returned to the colors in the autumn of 1813 when he raised a unit of light infantry to help fight the French at his own expense. Field, *Wellington's Waterloo Allies*, 95.

<sup>17</sup> These were either the pieces noted by Kincaid or other guns of the same battery.

<sup>18</sup> See "Report of the First Hanoverian Infantry Brigade on its Participation in the Battle of La Belle Alliance," in Gareth Glover, ed., *The Waterloo Archive*, vol. 2, *German Sources* (Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2014), 96–97.

ally at Quatre Bras, it had suffered such terrible losses that its four battalions had been combined into two composite units. Closest to the French attack was the ad hoc formation composed by the 30th and 73d Regiments of Foot, and, like the battalions around it, this had been severely pounded by the French artillery. Thomas Morris was a private in the ranks of the 73d Regiment and recalled,

On their next advance they brought some artillerymen . . . and fired into us with grapeshot, which proved very destructive, making complete lanes through us. . . . On looking around I saw my left-hand man falling backwards, the blood gushing from his eye; my poor comrade on the right, by the same discharge, got a ball through his right thigh of which he died a few days afterwards. Our situation now was truly awful: our men were falling by dozens with every fire. About this time a large shell fell just in front of us, and while the fuse was burning out we wondered how many of us it would destroy. When it burst . . . seventeen men were killed or wounded by it: the portion which came to my share was a piece of rough cast-iron about the size of a horse-bean which took up its lodging in my left cheek; the blood ran down copiously inside my clothes and made me rather uncomfortable.<sup>19</sup>

Nor were things any better with the 30th Regiment. As an officer called Tincombe recalled, "At length, the French brought artillery within range of us and poured grape, canister and everything they could think of into our square and nearly cut us to pieces."<sup>20</sup> Among the dead were Ensign Henry Beere and Captain Thomas Chambers, a diminutive man shot dead by a French sniper only moments after observing that, as the smallest man in the regiment, he was entirely safe.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Sgt Thomas Morris, *Recollections of Military Service in 1813, 1814, and 1815 through Germany, Holland, and France; Including Some Details of the Battles of Quatre Bras and Waterloo* (London: Madden, 1845), 149, hereafter *Recollections*.

<sup>20</sup> As cited in Carole Divall, *Redcoats against Napoleon: The 30th Regiment during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2009), 171–72.

<sup>21</sup> Divall, *Redcoats against Napoleon*, 176–77.

The men facing the French assault, then, were already in a bad way, and they now visibly quailed before the sight bearing down on them, and all the more so as the commander of the division to which Halkett, Kielmansegg, and Ompteda all belonged, Karl von Alten, had just been badly wounded. Having cleared the constriction represented by La Haye Sainte and its attendant garden and orchard, the leading French troops shook out their formation a little, the two battalions in the center deploying into line so that they could, if necessary, make use of musketry to clear the way, but they showed no signs of halting and pressed on up the slope. This was too much. In brief, Kielmansegg's men broke and fled, as did the survivors of Ompteda's brigade—according to some accounts, indeed, this had already disintegrated.<sup>22</sup> Vincke's two battalions did not last much longer, though at least their discipline held to an extent sufficient for the retreat to be made in good order, while two companies even sacrificed their lives in a heroic counterattack.<sup>23</sup> As for Private Morris and his fellow redcoats, at first they did very well, checking and even driving back the battalion initially opposed to them, but they found themselves under heavy artillery fire from close range and were ordered to fall back in the hope of finding shelter. This, however, proved a mistake: in turning to retire to the rear, the men lost their discipline and ended up fleeing in disorder. All the while they were raked by a hail of shot and shell that added still further to the carnage and confusion. In the words of Ensign Edward Macready of the 30th Foot, "Pren-dergast . . . was shattered to pieces by a shell [and] McNab killed by grapeshot, and James and Bullen lost all their legs by roundshot. . . . As I recovered my feet from a tumble, a friend knocked up against me, seized me by the stock, and almost choked me, screaming (half maddened by his five wounds and the sad scene going on), 'Is it deep, Mac, is it deep?'"<sup>24</sup> Reaching an irregularity of ground that gave them

<sup>22</sup> Field, *Wellington's Waterloo Allies*, 122–23; and Tim Clayton, *Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe's Destiny* (London: Little, Brown, 2014), 491.

<sup>23</sup> The Hanoverian reports and other documents that are the best sources for this episode are confused and in many instances distinctly self-serving, but it is clear that the two brigades collapsed and took no further part in the battle. See Glover, *The Waterloo Archive*, vol. 2, *German Sources*, 103–14.

<sup>24</sup> As cited in Glover, *The Waterloo Archive*, vol. 2, *German Sources*, 508–9. For the vicissitudes experienced by this battalion, see Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Waterloo 1815: The British Army's Day of Destiny* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2014), 223–26; and Ber-

gave them some protection, the survivors were rallied by a Captain Garland who made a gallant attempt to organize a counterattack at the head of the light company, only for the men concerned to be shot to pieces in an instant. Wrote Morris, “About a dozen of us responded to the call, and, such was the destructive fire to which we were opposed, that it was not long before every one of our party, except me and my brother, was either killed or wounded.”<sup>25</sup>

Though we do not have all the details, it is clear that something very serious happened at this point. Confronted by William Siborne’s circular letter requesting information on the climax of the battle, Macready sent him a letter he had drafted some years earlier with the intention of sending it to a friend but never actually put in the post for fear of the possible repercussions. In brief, it paints a picture of a battalion completely out of control.

That there was a great giving way . . . is certain enough. . . . Late in the day the French brought up two guns on the crest of our position which fired grape into our square . . . with very deadly effect. Someone in authority must have thought that the bank of a hedge which ran a very short distance in our rear would afford us some cover, and in an evil moment we received the command to face about and march down to it.<sup>26</sup> You may readily conceive that the fire would not slacken on a body effecting such a movement, but, though suffering sadly, and disordered by our poor wounded fellows clinging to their comrades thinking they were being abandoned, our little square retained its formation, and we had all but reached the hedge, when

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nard Cornwell, *Waterloo: The History of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles* (London: William Collins, 2014), 292–96.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, *Recollections*, 153.

<sup>26</sup> The mention of this hedge is interesting. Given that the Ohain road was not only unhedged in the sector held by Halkett’s brigade but also very much its front line, the only possibility for its situation would seem to be the Nivelles highway. That being the case, what occurred was not the tactical retreat of a few yards suggested by Macready, but rather a panic-stricken flight that took the battalion back a good half a kilometer. Meanwhile, the reference to it being formed in square is interesting: such a formation was desperately ill-suited to combat against infantry, while it was also particularly vulnerable to artillery.

a body of men (British) rushed in upon us, turned us altogether into a mere mob, and created a scene of frightful confusion. Nothing could be more gratifying than the conduct of our people at this disastrous period. While men and officers were jammed together and carried along by the pressure from without, many of the latter, some cursing, others literally crying with rage and shame, were seizing the soldiers and calling on them to halt, while these admirable fellows, good-humouredly laughing at their excitement, were struggling to get out of the *mêlée*, or exclaiming, “By God, I’ll stop, Sir, but I’m off my legs.”<sup>27</sup>

Within minutes, then, a massive hole had been torn in Wellington’s center. The nearest troops available to plug the gap were a single regiment of green-coated German troops from the principality of Nassau under a Colonel August von Kruse.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the wretched Hanoverian militiamen, most of whom were undergoing their baptism of fire, at least some members of this unit—the three battalion-strong 1st Infantry Regiment—were veterans of the Peninsular War, and had already proved their worth earlier in the day: several companies, for example, had taken part in the defense of Hougoumont. Since then, however, they had come under the same heavy fire as the rest of Wellington’s center and begun to buckle under the strain. At the same time, the men who had fought in Spain and Portugal had been padded out with new recruits who were no more steady than their Hanoverian fellows, its third battalion, indeed, being wholly composed

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<sup>27</sup> E. Macready to LtCol Gawler, 30 November 1836, in Siborne, *Waterloo Letters*, 330–31. As will be appreciated, Macready’s account throws all the blame on the unnamed unit that “rushed in” on the battalion (presumably, the composite battalion made up of the 30th and 33d Foot commanded by Elphinstone; see below). However, there is a strong sense that he is protesting a little too much: the retreat was clearly little more than a panic flight, something that is rendered still more likely if the objective was indeed, as postulated above, the Nivelles highway. Also interesting is the fact that the battalion is described as being in square, a term that Macready may well have seized to cloak the reality of a mass of fugitives.

<sup>28</sup> Why this unit was present in the center is unclear, but one of its three battalions had been fighting at Hougoumont and the other two over on the extreme left wing at Papelotte, and the need to reinforce the center may have been seized as a good opportunity to bring the regiment back together again.

of hastily mobilized landwehr. As Baron Constant de Rebecque, who was serving as chief of staff to the commander of I Corps, the Prince of Orange, afterward complained: "I was regularly required to go . . . to rally the three squares of the Nassau contingent, which were composed of young soldiers under fire for the first time and often retired: I brought them back several times. At one point one of these battalions was put into complete disorder when a shell exploded amidst their ranks. I rode ahead of them and fortunately managed to bring them back."<sup>29</sup> In the circumstances, it was a wonder that anything was got out of them at all, but the prince, still only 18 and otherwise known as "Slender Billy," was well liked by his men and was able to inspire them sufficiently to get them to advance on the enemy. Just at the crucial moment, however, disaster struck. To quote the same observer, "In that instant . . . the Prince of Orange's horse was wounded, and he was struck by a piece of grapeshot which pierced his left shoulder and threw him to the ground. . . . Several *aides de camp* arrived and led him from the field of battle and carried him in a blanket to Waterloo."<sup>30</sup> The story of what happened next is recounted in the report submitted after the action by Kruse.

The attack was carried out with great bravery. I saw one side of a square of the French Guard start to waver when, perhaps because the Prince of Orange was wounded, a wave of panic hit the young soldiers, and, at the moment of their greatest victory, the [first] battalion fell into confusion and retreated . . . leaving only small bodies of brave men on the plateau. I had the *landwehr* battalion and . . . the second battalion join them, but in such a way that the enemy fire could have little effect on them.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> J. V. Constant de Rebecque, "Account of the Waterloo Campaign," (n.d.), in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Rebecque, "Account of the Waterloo Campaign," 19.

<sup>31</sup> As quoted in Peter Hofschröer, *1815: The Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 2, *The German Victory: From Waterloo to the Fall of Napoleon* (London: Greenhill Books, 1999), 137. While the main points of this account are fair enough, to a certain extent Kruse was clearly writing for effect. The last sentence is a study in ambiguity and half-truth: rather than joining "the small bodies of brave men on the plateau," the units mentioned turned and ran at the sight of the first battalion giving way. As for the reference to the French being formed in square, Kruse must have been mistaken. See Clayton, *Waterloo*, 488–91.

The situation for the Anglo-Dutch Army was now bleak in the extreme. On the other side of the crossroads, the nearest troops available were in no state to mount a counterattack: the first battalion of the famous 95th Foot, now under the command of a mere captain, was under severe pressure from the French troops who had seized the knoll where they had originally been stationed, while, famously, the 27th Foot had been standing in square under such heavy fire that they had lost more than two-thirds of their strength.<sup>32</sup> As for the other shoulder of the breakthrough, the troops here consisted of the second of the two composite battalions that Halkett had headed at the start of the day, and this was if anything in an even worse state than its fellow, one of its two constituent units (the 69th Foot) having suffered the indignity of losing a color at Quatre Bras and the other (the 33d Foot) being commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Elphinstone, a dithering incompetent who had risen through the ranks entirely by purchase and went on to lose an entire British army in the First Afghan War of 1839–42. When Halkett ordered his men to advance by wheeling to the left to take the guard in flank, then, the result was not impressive. Initially, some success was achieved; there are even reports of French troops in the path of Halkett's men running away, though it is probable that these were not soldiers of the Imperial Guard but rather some of the French skirmishers who had spread out from La Haye Sainte in the wake of its capture. However, the composite battalion was caught by a terrible discharge of canister and brought to a halt, while Halkett was struck down by a musket ball

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<sup>32</sup> For a description of the situation in this sector at this point, see Jonathan Leach, *Rough Sketches in the Life of an Old Soldier during a Service in the East Indies, at the Siege of Copenhagen in 1807, in the Peninsula and the South of France in the Campaigns from 1808 to 1814 with the Light Division, in the Netherlands in 1815, Including the Battles of Quatre Bras and Waterloo, with a Slight Sketch of the Three Years Passed by the Army of Occupation in France* (London: Longmans, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1831), 390–92. Though under severe pressure, the riflemen never wavered but held their ground admirably. However, their inability to intervene in what was happening on the other side of the crossroads is illustrated by an incident in which a number of officers stationed on the battalion's right flank warned Leach that the French were showing signs of pushing up the main road through the cutting by which it crossed the summit of Mont Saint-Jean and therefore asked permission to wheel their men to the right so that they could take the road in flank, only to be told by Leach that he had no men to spare for such a task and that any breakthrough would have to be dealt with by the much-tried 27th Foot. See Caldwell and Cooper, *Rifle Green at Waterloo*, 59.



that struck him in the mouth. Losing his nerve, Elphinstone immediately ordered a withdrawal, the result of which was a second panic and, with it, the disastrous collision described by Macready above.<sup>33</sup>

Thus far, Wellington had fought his battle extremely well, having almost always contrived to be at the proverbial right place at the right time, but, perhaps misled by a French deserter who had galloped up to a unit stationed on his center right shouting that the Imperial Guard was about to attack, he was currently several hundred yards away with the guards brigade of Sir Peregrine Maitland. So thick was the smoke that at first he did not seem to have realized what was happening. Finally advised of the crisis by a staff officer named James Shaw-Kennedy who had witnessed the French breakthrough, he ordered the five battalions of Brunswick troops present on the field to plug the gap and sent other officers to find out the exact situation. Though stiffened by a cadre of Peninsular War veterans, most of these troops too were very raw, while they had also suffered many hundreds of casualties at Quatre Bras, not to mention the loss of their commander and, indeed, head of state, Duke Frederick William. Indeed, so unsteady had they appeared during the French cavalry charges that, finding himself in their vicinity, Cavalié Mercer had elected to fight his guns to the end rather than letting his men take shelter in the nearest squares, for fear that the sight of the crews sprinting for safety would cause panic in their ranks. His words, indeed, are worth quoting.

The Brunswickers were falling fast, the shot every moment making great gaps in their squares, which the officers and sergeants were actively employed in filling up by pushing their men together, and sometimes thumping them ere they could make them move. . . . They fled, not bodily to be sure, but spiritually, for their senses seemed to have left them: there they stood . . . like so many logs. . . . Every moment I feared they would again throw down their arms and flee.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Nigel Sale, *The Lie at the Heart of the Battle of Waterloo: The Battle's Hidden Last Half Hour* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2014), 73–76.

<sup>34</sup> Mercer, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign Kept throughout the Campaign of 1815*, vol. 1, 312.

Like all the other defenders, then, the Brunswickers did not prove equal to the crisis, despite the fact that Wellington himself had ridden forward to lead them into battle. As William Siborne later wrote, albeit in a tone that was clearly designed to cause as little embarrassment as possible,

The reinforcement which Wellington had provided for this part of the line, consisting of five battalions of Brunswick infantry, moved rapidly into the interval between Kruse's Nassau and Halkett's British brigades. But so unexpectedly did the Brunswickers find themselves placed under a most destructive fire, and so suddenly were the columns assailed, that they were unable, in the midst of the thick smoke in which they became involved, from the partial irregularities, by which, under such circumstances, their advance was accompanied, to form up in sufficient order, before they came in close contact with the enemy, whose vigorous attack compelled them . . . to fall back about 100 paces.<sup>35</sup>

What this account does not make clear is that the Brunswickers' flight was only checked by the efforts of the thin line of British light cavalry that formed Wellington's last line of defense, the latter literally damming the torrent of fugitives with horseflesh. The potential role of the British cavalry at this point is worth considering. Earlier in the day, the attack of Drouet's corps had been smashed at what appeared to be the moment of victory by the famous charge of the Household and Union Brigades. However, allowed to gallop out of control deep into the enemy positions, the troops concerned had suffered such terrible casualties that they were in effect out of action for the rest of the battle. As for the rest of allied cavalry, this had not dis-

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<sup>35</sup> William Siborne, *The Waterloo Campaign, 1815*, 4th ed. (Birmingham, UK: Turnbull and Spears, 1894), 514. Discussing the battle with Lord Palmerston in the course of a visit to Paris by the latter in September 1815, Wellington gives a still more discreditable account of this incident, claiming that the troops concerned fired at him when he rode up to rally them. See Viscount Palmerston, *Selections from Private Journals of Tours in France in 1815 and 1818* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1871), 14. According to Wellington, the culprits were Nassauers rather than Brunswickers, but this appears to be the product of a lapse of memory on his part, as no evidence has been found that the duke was in the vicinity at the time of Kruse's counterattack.

tinguished itself. Beginning with the Germans and Dutch-Belgians, many units had either refused to charge at one moment or another, fallen into complete disorder, or decamped from the field altogether. That this was so is evident even from accounts emanating from the regiments concerned. Willem van Heerdt, for example, was a staff officer attached to General Charles-Étienne de Ghigny's 1st Netherlands Light Cavalry Brigade; his account comes from some point late in the afternoon.

As the brigade had suffered severely from the heavy cannonade and was threatened by a superior cavalry, it was ordered to take a position further to the rear, which was complied with accordingly in the most gallant manner, yet the moment it retook its positions in front of the enemy, the second line got into disorder and left the field. The general instructed Colonel Duvivier, who was present with some men of his regiment, to do his utmost to find and collect his men. Of the Eighth Hussars, Captain Ducha was killed [while] those who were wounded included Major de Villiers, Second Lieutenants Gérard, De Bailler and De Villers, plus numerous men and horses.<sup>36</sup>

If this was to be expected—the Dutch-Belgian cavalry at Quatre Bras had taken a heavy beating at the hands of their opponents and there-

<sup>36</sup> W. van Heerdt to E. van Löben Sels, 19 September 1841, in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 159. As a sergeant in the 8th Hussars later remembered, by the time that the guard attacked, the regiment had lost all capacity to take part in the fighting: "Towards the end of the affair we stood in battle order behind the Fourth Light Dragoon Regiment and were galled by severe cannon fire which inflicted severe losses on both men and horses. Soon the remnants of the regiments became intermixed. Colonel Duvier and Bevet Major de Quaita were dismounted: to the last, being my company commander, I offered my horse, and I mounted a trooper's horse. We reassembled close to the Forêt de Soignies. At this time I saw the Prince of Orange being carried away wounded. His Royal Highness addressed us in a gracious way, saying 'Forward Hussars!'" As quoted in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 164. Reading between the lines of these accounts, it is quite clear that what happened was nothing less than a panic-stricken rout that carried the 8th to Waterloo and beyond. Meanwhile, the worst example among the German cavalry is the unit of well-heeled Hanoverian volunteers known as the Cumberland Hussars, this simply riding off the field en masse at about 1700 in the afternoon under the lead of its colonel, Georg von Hake. See Field, *Wellington's Waterloo Allies*, 143–44.

fore had little confidence in themselves—even some of their British comrades had proved extremely unsteady. To such an extent was this the case, indeed, that after the battle it was a matter of common gossip, the fact that this was so being particularly clear from the journals and correspondence of James Stanhope, a lieutenant colonel in the 1st Guards. In a letter to Lady Stanhope he complains that “our light cavalry made no head” against the “most immense body of cavalry” that assailed Wellington’s center-right in the course of the afternoon, and, in general, showed “a lamentable inferiority,” while elsewhere we learn that the light cavalry “did very little,” “behaved infamously,” and even “might as well have been in England,” and that at one point he saw “Lord Uxbridge riding about in the most gallant manner, heading everything but lamenting that the cavalry had all deserted him.”<sup>37</sup> In his account of the battle, Sir Walter Scott suggested a possible reason for this—namely that, composed of light cavalry alone, the units concerned felt badly outclassed by the French cuirassiers, but on the desperate afternoon of 18 June 1815 such questions counted for little.<sup>38</sup> As one infantryman in a beleaguered square was heard to shout, “Where are the cavalry?”<sup>39</sup>

The disorder, then, was spreading by the moment. Farther along the ridge toward Hougoumont the brigades of Maitland and Sir John Colborne were still relatively intact, but they dared not abandon their positions for fear that a fresh wave of French cavalry would burst out of the smoke and take them in flank as they marched on the crossroads. As the staff officer who had ridden to warn Wellington later wrote, the situation was becoming increasingly dark.

La Haye Sainte was in the hands of the enemy, also

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<sup>37</sup> See Gareth Glover, ed., *Eyewitness to the Peninsular War and the Battle of Waterloo: The Letters and Journals of Lieutenant Colonel the Honourable James Stanhope, 1803 to 1825* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2010), 177–92. After the French were repulsed, the brigades of Vivian and Vandeleur did charge the enemy, but to believe that the situation here described could have been restored by a repeat of the attack of the Household and Union Brigades is clearly optimistic in the extreme: indeed, even with the whole of the French left wing falling apart in rout, the 23d Light Dragoons contrived to be driven back by some French cavalry that had ridden up to support the guard. See Glover, *Waterloo: The Defeat of Napoleon’s Imperial Guard*, 151–52.

<sup>38</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Paul’s Letters to His Kinfolk* (Edinburgh, UK: Archibald Constable, 1816), 91–92.

<sup>39</sup> As quoted in Alessandro Barbero, *The Battle: A New History of Waterloo*, trans. John Cullen (New York: Walker, 2005), 258.

the knoll on the opposite side of the road, also the garden and the ground on the Anglo-Allied side of it. . . . Ompteda's brigade was nearly annihilated and Kielmansegg's so thinned that [it] could not hold [its] position. That part of the field of battle, therefore, which was between Halkett's left and Kempt's right was unprotected, and, being the very centre of the Duke's line of battle, was consequently that point, above all others, which the enemy wished to gain. The danger was imminent.<sup>40</sup>

However, the Anglo-Dutch were not quite finished. In brief, one last force of infantry remained to Wellington in the form of the Dutch-Belgian division commanded by Lieutenant General Chassé, a hard-bitten veteran who had served for many years in the French Army prior to 1814. Originally stationed on the extreme right of the defending line near the village of Braine-l'Alleud, these troops—formally speaking, the 3d Netherlands Infantry Division—had a little while before been brought over to support the tottering allied center, and, without waiting for orders from Wellington, Chassé now launched his men at the triumphant guard in a desperate counterattack that was spearheaded by the Belgian artillery battery of Captain Carel Kraemer and the Dutch infantry brigade of General Hendrik Detmers. As Chassé later wrote,

When I saw that an English artillery battery positioned on the left . . . of my division had stopped firing, I went . . . to enquire the reason and learned that there was no ammunition. At the same time I saw the Garde Impériale advancing, while the English troops were leaving the plateau en masse and moving in the direction of Waterloo. I immediately ordered the battery of horse artillery under the command of Major van der Smissen [*sic*] to advance, to occupy the height and to direct an emphatic fire upon the enemy column. At this time I also ordered Major-General d'Aubremé to have the

<sup>40</sup> Gen Sir James Shaw Kennedy, *Notes on the Battle of Waterloo* (London: John Murray, 1865), 126–27.

brigade he commanded form two squares in echelon and to form a reserve with the foot artillery. I [then] positioned myself at the head of the First Brigade and advanced in close columns at attack pace against the French.<sup>41</sup>

An eyewitness to the scene was Ensign Macready of the 30th Foot. As he wrote, “A heavy column of Dutch infantry . . . passed, drumming and shouting like mad with their shakos on the top of their bayonets.”<sup>42</sup> Among the soldiers charging the enemy, meanwhile, was Chassé’s chief of staff, Leonhard van Delen: “After having made a short but very zealous and appropriate speech, [His Excellency] . . . assembled all the battalions of the First Brigade and advanced towards the enemy, while the drums beat the attack. . . . [To the accompaniment] of shouts of ‘Long live the King!’, the . . . brigade moved forward against the heavy enemy musket fire, and ignored the fact that it was now threatened by a cavalry charge.”<sup>43</sup> As a private in the 4th Militia named Adriaan Munter wrote in a letter to his family dated 22 July 1815, “We fought like lions. The general shouted, ‘Keep courage children!’, and this gave us new courage so as to continue.”<sup>44</sup> It was a brave effort, but it was not enough. Three of Detmers’s five battalions were raw militia, and, inevitably, they quailed in the face of the disciplined volleys to which the troops they were attacking subjected them. Among the casualties was yet another senior officer, this time the Prince of Orange’s chief of staff, Constant de Rebecque: “At this very moment a cannon ball ricocheted off the ground and hit my horse in the girths, covering me with mud and stones, and I received part of the blow on the fleshy part of my left leg. The very next instant

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<sup>41</sup> D. H. Chassé to C. Nepveu, 27 April 1836, in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 116. The reference to the horse artillery battery being commanded by Maj van der Smissen is somewhat confusing. Technically speaking, Chassé is correct in that that officer commanded the two batteries that formed the artillery component of the 3d Netherlands Division. However, the horse artillery unit that took part in the attack was under the direct command of Carel Krahrmer.

<sup>42</sup> As quoted in Clayton, *Waterloo*, 534.

<sup>43</sup> L. van Delen to J. V. Constant de Rebecque, 11 November 1815, in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 125.

<sup>44</sup> A. Munter to his family, 22 July 1815, in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 141.

... a grapeshot hit the steel scabbard of my sabre and forced it against my leg so that it was folded in half [in such a way] that I could only sheath half the weapon.”<sup>45</sup> Even then, it is possible that something could have been saved from the rout—Chassé had only committed half his force and might yet have at least checked the French—but, at that very moment, the fortunes of war finally turned against the allies. Determined to do everything he could to save the day, accompanied by the commander of his cavalry and, indeed, second in command, Lord Uxbridge, Wellington had joined the Dutch general, and was just in the process of ordering Uxbridge to send in the relatively fresh light cavalry brigades of Vandeleur and Sir Richard (later Hussey) Vivian, when he suddenly stopped in mid-sentence and turned very white. The exchange that followed has gone down in history as a classic example of British understatement. Wellington said, “By God, sir, I have lost my leg.” Uxbridge replied, “By God, sir, so you have.”<sup>46</sup>

Swaying in the saddle, Wellington was escorted from the field to have his leg amputated by a hard-pressed surgeon in a cottage at Waterloo, from where he was evacuated to Antwerp and finally to a Britain that turned its collective back on him and left him to live out the many years that were left to him in an increasingly embittered

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<sup>45</sup> Rebecque, “Account of the Waterloo Campaign,” 20.

<sup>46</sup> In fairness to Detmer’s troops, it is but justice to observe here that in reality their courageous counterattack saved the day in the sector discussed. The way having been prepared by Krahmer’s guns, they charged home and broke the three grenadier battalions facing them. Such was the courage that the Dutch troops displayed, that it would be an injustice not to cite at least one account of their triumph. Hendrik Holle was a lieutenant in the 6th Militia: “Now we were deployed in battle order. General Chassé came before our front . . . and had the muskets shouldered. He said, ‘In a few moments you will leave the second line and go over to the first. Keep calm, depend upon my command and especially your brave officers. The battle is not yet decided, but how great will it be for you to have taken part in its outcome.’ The repeated shouts of ‘We would rather die for king and country!’ forced him to stop his speech. Within moments we formed close columns and . . . advanced. Our brave colonel was killed with some twenty others . . . . When we had closed to within thirty paces of the enemy we . . . began to pour a heavy fire into them, which made them turn and run in the greatest confusion.” H. Holle to his sister, 10 July, 1815, in Franklin, *Waterloo: Netherlands Correspondence*, 138–39. As for Wellington’s loss of his leg, the victim was, of course, not the duke, but Uxbridge. It should be observed, however, that the two were riding side by side when the latter was hit: a foot to the left and Waterloo might well have become an echo of Trafalgar.

retirement on his family estate in Ireland. Behind him, meanwhile, there reigned a scene of chaos. Hearing that the duke was down, Detmers's brigade were gripped by panic, and, as one man, turned and fled. As for Uxbridge, though utterly unprepared for the task he now faced—prior to the battle, Wellington had rebuffed his every attempt to discuss his plans—he saw clearly enough that the day had been lost. The headquarters was a shambles—almost all of the duke's personal staff had either been killed or wounded—many divisional and brigade commanders were down, there were few reserves of infantry left in a fit state to fight, much of the army's artillery had been silenced, ammunition was running short, and the last news he had of the Prussians was that, while unknown numbers had penetrated Napoléon's right rear, there was still no sign of the troops who had been supposed to link up with Wellington's left wing. It was a grim situation, by far the worst, indeed, that any British general had faced since the battle of Saratoga in 1777. Uxbridge bowed his head and sighed wearily—it would be the end of his career, for sure—but there was nothing for it.<sup>47</sup> Summoning up several aides-de-camp, he gave orders for all units to fall back and rally on the edge of the forest of Soignies beyond Waterloo; at least, he thought, there should not be much in the way of a pursuit, the vast bulk of the French cavalry having been used up in the fighting of the afternoon.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This is something of a moot point. Uxbridge had done well in the campaign of La Coruña under Sir John Moore, been responsible for the charge that had overthrown Drouet's grand attack on Wellington's center-left, and in general shown great courage, while he was also well connected in Britain. That said, as he candidly admitted, it was in large part his fault that the Household and Union Brigades had got so out of control, while, having very publicly eloped with the wife of his brother, Henry, he could expect little support from Wellington. At the same time, there was an obvious successor in the person of the highly popular and extremely competent commander of II Corps, Rowland Hill.

<sup>48</sup> Connoisseurs of the Battle of Waterloo will know well enough when this account slides into complete fantasy. It will be noted, however, that the changes that have been made to the narrative of the actual battle are actually very few. Thus, it is assumed, first, that Napoléon met Ney's request for reinforcements in the wake of the fall of La Haye Sainte, not with a snarling "Troops? Troops? Do you expect me to make troops?" but rather with a recognition that the situation demanded that he throw in every single man that remained to him; and, second, that the attack of the guard was handled in such a fashion that its troops hit the wavering defenders simultaneously at one point only, namely the very weakest segment of Wellington's line. Underpinning the whole, meanwhile, is the firm belief that the guard advanced not in square, as is often



Fantasy? Well, of course, but nonetheless fantasy that is by no means implausible. The Battle of Waterloo, as the Duke of Wellington famously observed, was “a near-run thing.” Contained in this observation is a simple truth that is often overlooked: the French could easily have won. Had matters been handled differently, there was a very real possibility that Wellington’s “infamous army,” as he called it, could have been driven from the field before the Prussians arrived: speaking in part for effect though he certainly was, Napoléon’s famous pronouncement to his staff over breakfast at Le Caillou on the morning of 18 June to the effect that the French had 90 chances in their favor as opposed to only 10 against does have a certain ring of truth to it.<sup>49</sup> Famously enough, of course, to the end of his days the beaten emperor was insistent that he actually did triumph over Wellington at Mont Saint-Jean. To quote the recollections of the surgeon who attended to him on Saint Helena, Barry O’Meara, of a conversation he had with the exiled emperor one evening, “I . . . took the liberty of asking whether, if neither Grouchy nor the Prussians had arrived, it would have been a drawn battle. Napoléon answered, ‘The English army would have been destroyed. They were [already] defeated at midday.’”<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, many of the men who fought under him were still more explicit in their analysis. Here, for example, is Captain Jean-Baptiste Lemonnier-Delafosse’s summary of the events of 18 June: “It was an extraordinary battle, the only one in which we have an instance of the two opponents both being beaten, the English first and then the French! A battle that the Prussians won themselves by arriving on the field of struggle fresh and ready to fight at a moment when the French oppressed by fatigue, by twelve hours of combat.”<sup>51</sup>

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claimed, albeit on grounds that have always seemed to the current author to be somewhat dubious, but rather in column: good troops could certainly maneuver in square, but to have attempted to attack in this formation would have been a recipe for disaster.

<sup>49</sup> For this incident, see Henry [sic] Houssaye, *1815: Waterloo*, trans. by Arthur Emile Mann (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1900), 177.

<sup>50</sup> See Barry E. O’Meara, *Napoleon in Exile or, a Voice from Saint Helena: The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon on the Most Important Events of His Life and Government in his Own Words*, vol. 1 (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1822), 174–75.

<sup>51</sup> Christophe Bourachot, ed., *Souvenirs militaires du capitaine Jean-Baptiste Lemonnier-Delafosse* (Paris: Le Livre chez vous, 2002), 224.

It has to be said, of course, that what has been described here is essentially a tactical victory, and, further, that it was just about the most favorable result that the emperor could have hoped for given the situation that he faced on the morning of 18 June. We have left Wellington's army in disarray, certainly, but also with a safe line of retreat into and through the forest of Soignies, and, what is more, an opponent that had suffered heavy casualties, was devoid of the means of launching an effective pursuit, and, finally, had become increasingly embattled with the oncoming Prussians. One scenario, then, is that the Army of the Netherlands could have rallied during the night. Providing the Prussians had not themselves pulled back, the combat could then have been resumed the next day with the assistance of the 17,000 men whom Wellington had left to protect the main Paris-Brussels highway at Halle, this being a scenario that might even have plucked victory from the jaws of defeat.<sup>52</sup>

Much more likely, of course, would have been a Prussian retreat: several of the Prussian generals, including, not least, Blücher's chief of staff, Gneisenau, had never been entirely comfortable with the decision to stay in touch with Wellington, and it is impossible not to suspect that their opinion would have prevailed. Yet, even had the Prussians fallen back in the direction of the Rhine, this would not necessarily have been a prelude to a great French victory. Once again, we return to the devastation that had been unleashed on the French cavalry: to reiterate, no effective pursuit was possible insofar as Napoléon's wing of the Army of the North was concerned. In the first place, then, Uxbridge would almost certainly have been able to get clear with his army in one piece; Brussels would have had to be abandoned, certainly, but beyond the Belgian capital lay the massive for-

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<sup>52</sup> For a convincing exposition of such an argument, see Andrew Uffindell, "Napoléon and Waterloo," in J. North, *The Napoleon Options: Alternate Decisions of the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000), 187–202. It is interesting to note that to allow Napoléon to secure even such success as he was prepared to let him obtain, Uffindell felt it necessary to augment his forces with one of the corps that in reality he sent to pursue Grouchy. A weakness in the case the author makes, meanwhile, is that that commander is assumed simply to have sat passively on his hard-won gains of the day before at Limale throughout 19 June. While Grouchy was clearly out of his depth in the position he had been given in the wake of Ligny, this is stretching the imagination more than somewhat: by crossing the river Dyle and forcing back Thielmann's right flank, Grouchy had opened the way for his men to attack Blücher in the rear, and it is difficult to believe that he would not have exploited this opportunity.

treasury of Antwerp, and with it a sure refuge in which the Anglo-Dutch forces would have been completely safe. Indeed, the idea that Wellington might evade him and take refuge in Antwerp was a thought that had caused the emperor much concern the night before the battle. "Our first surprise as the day broke," wrote one French soldier, "was that the English had not only . . . resumed their position, but seemed . . . resolved to defend it. Bonaparte, who had no apprehension during the night but that they would escape the punishment he had designed for them, was animated by a most sensible joy at seeing them at their post: he was too fond of the game of war, and thought that he played it too well, to have any pleasure in a game only abandoned to him. He could not restrain the expression of his feeling to those who were around him. 'Bravo!', said he. 'The English! Ah, je les tiens donc!'"<sup>53</sup> To return to the situation in the wake of the battle, the Anglo-Dutch could almost certainly have got away, while the same applies to the Prussians. Having gained a partial victory in the fierce fighting that had broken out far too late around Wavre, Grouchy had secured a bridgehead across the river Dyle at Limale and was therefore threatening Blücher's line of retreat, but, with his rear protected by the same belt of hills and woods he had traversed the day before and his forces as yet but little damaged, the Prussian commander could probably have fallen on him and driven him back across the river before heading for the safety of the Rhine. The potential for an even greater triumph for French arms existed, then, but assured this latter prospect most certainly was not.

Could the Army of the North have achieved still more on 18 June? That this is the case is certainly a belief current among devotees of Napoléon Bonaparte. Insofar as this is concerned, we come here to the beliefs espoused by the American writers Peter Tsouras and Steven Marthinsen, both of whom have written alternative accounts of Waterloo. Of these, the first can be dealt with quite briefly as it is little more than a farrago of wish fulfilment. Thus, the narrative is beyond jejune; indeed, a Bonapartist dream come true, what we see being simply an elaboration of the constant claims that everything that went wrong in the campaign of the Hundred Days was the re-

<sup>53</sup> *The Journal of the Three Days of the Battle of Waterloo, Being My Own Personal Journal of What I Saw and of the Events in which I Bore a Part, in the Battle of Waterloo and Retreat to Paris, by an Eye-witness* (London: T. Chaplin, 1816), 43-44.

sponsibility of one or other of Napoléon's subordinates (one thinks here of such tropes as Grouchy failing to march to the sound of the guns, Soult proving a careless and incompetent chief of staff, Drouet adopting formations for his assault on Wellington's left that positively invited defeat, and Ney supposedly throwing away the whole of the French cavalry as a result of a mixture of battle madness and faulty readings of the battlefield). To cut a long story short, having got back to France, Napoléon is joined out of the proverbial blue in the nick of time by a Marshal Berthier repentant of his initial decision to flee into exile, and, with the erstwhile major general back in his old job, this in turn frees Marshal Soult to take up the post of commander of the left wing of the French push into Belgium, something to which he was much more suited than the job of being Berthier's replacement; as for Ney, meanwhile, his boast to Louis XVIII having come home to roost, he is frozen out and left with no option but to retire to his country estates. Nor is this the only change in the structure of command: rather than being left in Paris as minister of war, having rushed to join Napoléon at his headquarters to warn him of the impending treachery of General Bourmont (who is promptly arrested, thereby neutralizing another event claimed by the emperor's apologists to have damaged French chances of victory), Marshal Davout is retained at the front and given command of the infantry component of the French right wing, the role of the newly minted Marshal Grouchy therefore being limited to the command of the French reserve cavalry, this being one for which he was much better equipped. And, last but not least, the eminently competent and reliable Marshal Mortier does not, as in reality, fall ill (diplomatically or otherwise), but stays in his allotted role as commander of the Imperial Guard. As if all this was not enough, meanwhile, in the lead-up to war, much on the French home front goes far better than was actually the case, internal resistance collapsing (Tsouras does not even mention the revolt of the Vendée, something that took 20,000 troops to suppress and was not finally overcome till after Waterloo) and mobilization proceeding extremely well, so much so, indeed, that sufficient men become available for an extra force to be got together on the Belgian frontier in the vicinity of Mons.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Peter G. Tsouras, *Napoleon Victorious!: An Alternative History of the Battle of Water-*

When the campaign commences on 15 June, then, the French have many factors in their favor, while the new command structure quickly proves its worth, most crucially, by the ever-thrusting Marshal Soult, first, seizing control of the vital crossroads of Quatre Bras by the end of the day, and, then, at last light routing the brigade of Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar (the 2d Brigade of Perponcher's 2d Netherlands Division, and, with it, the vanguard of the men sent rushing to seize the hitherto undefended crossroads) with the loss of its unfortunate commander.<sup>55</sup> In consequence, Tsouras's 16 June is one not of frustration and disappointed hopes, but rather happy success, and all the more so as, already struggling with the fruits of their faulty deployment, Wellington and Blücher alike are hampered by an endless series of misunderstandings. While the French left quickly destroys the other brigade of Perponcher's division and in the process captures the commander of the corps to which it belonged (no less a person than the Prince of Orange), reinforced by the arrival of such troops as that of the corps of General Mouton (that on the day never reached the field in time), thanks to, first, the defection of the Saxon forces that had been forcibly incorporated into the Prussian Army, and, second, the exemplary skills of Davout and Grouchy, Napoléon crushes the Prussians at Ligny, his opponents' terrible losses including no less a figure than a Blücher sabred to death by French light cavalry. Nor was this an end to the disaster suffered by the allies for, on the one hand, Soult pushed his victorious forces all the way forward to La Belle Alliance and savaged a Hanoverian brigade sent to hold the village of Braine-l'Alleud before being forced to pull back by the approach of the two British divisions of I Corps, while Grouchy's horsemen pressed the fleeing Prussians throughout the night in the direction of Wavre, thereby greatly increasing their toll of dead, wounded, and missing. And, finally, at Quatre Bras, left behind to guard the crossroads from the Anglo-Dutch forces known still to be somewhere to the west (the residue of Orange's I Corps), the division of Jérôme Bonaparte repelled a fierce counterattack on the part of Chassé's 3d Netherlands Division and a single brigade of Dutch light cavalry under Major General Charles de Ghigny, yet an-

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loo (Barnsley, UK: Greenhill Books, 2018), 28–32, 38–46.

<sup>55</sup> Tsouras, *Napoleon Victorious!*, 64–72.

other problem for Wellington being that the scratch French force sent to make head at Mons had crossed the frontier without resistance and marched on Ghent, a development that inhibited him from calling in the numerous troops he had left to guard the main Paris-Brussels road at Halle.<sup>56</sup>

On 16 June the Army of the North had been on the move since before dawn, and the next day the pattern was repeated (much refreshed by 10 months of enforced rest on Elba, Napoléon had also made use of the opportunity to address his growing waistline, the result being that he was remarked by all who saw him to have regained the enormous vitality of earlier years). Very soon, meanwhile, the early bird was catching the worm. Thus, fearing (quite rightly) that Wellington was on the brink of withdrawing rather than face an action without the support of the Prussians, who, he assumed, were now most unlikely to march across from their bivouacs around Wavre to join him, Soult sent the corps of General Reille to renew the previous day's attack on Braine-l'Alleud and at the same time assault Hougomont. Launched in the first instance by cavalry only, the French advance was beaten off easily enough, but it had nonetheless achieved its object, having left Wellington with no option but to turn at bay and man the whole position stretching from Braine-l'Alleud to Papelotte and that in the absence of almost a full division of Dutch-Belgian infantry, the only genuinely bright spot in his situation was that during the night he had been joined by all of his own cavalry (scattered broadcast across the area to the southwest of Brussels, this had necessarily taken some time to cross the many kilometers of intervening countryside). The battle that followed can only be described as climactic in the extreme. Without going into all the details, Reille having driven his right from Braine-l'Alleud and Hougomont and Drouet his left from Papelotte, by the end of the day Wellington was caught in a vice centered on the farm of that name and his army reduced to shreds; as for the Prussians, after much argument, they had at last resolved to march to Wellington's assistance and their leading corps—that of Bülow—had penetrated all the way to Plancenoit, only for disaster to strike them when Davout succeeded in cutting Bülow off from the rest of the army by seizing Lasne and

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<sup>56</sup> Tsouras, *Napoleon Victorious!*, 73–95.

then crushing him with the corps of Vandamme. Caught in a trap, the Prussian commander was forced to surrender with the remains of his corps, while, at almost the exact same moment, what was left of Wellington's army was routed by a massive charge on the part of Grouchy's reserve cavalry, the Iron Duke being left with no option but to lay down his arms as well. As if to emphasize the drama of the moment, meanwhile, just as the last shots of the battle were fired, an almighty clap of thunder heralded the onset of a deluge that all those who survived to witness it remembered as being absolutely stupendous, indeed, positively biblical.<sup>57</sup>

The sequel to this farrago of nonsense—the collapse of the Seventh Coalition and Napoléon's definitive restoration as ruler of France—need not concern us here, but that it is indeed a farrago of nonsense there can be no doubt, not least because it is clearly written without the slightest understanding of the realities of the ground. Repeatedly, then, we see Napoléon and his commanders being gifted with powers of vision in respect of which even the most imposing crests present not the slightest obstacle. Meanwhile, the idea that everything could go so perfectly for one side and so badly for the other stretches credulity beyond the limits of the possible. Setting aside his evident belief that many of the things that went wrong for Napoléon in 1815 were the responsibility of the usual scapegoats, Tsouras does have a point with respect to the extraordinary tardiness of the Army of the North on both 16 and 17 June—by driving his men harder, the emperor might well have secured a result before the onset of the admittedly disastrous storm of the night before Waterloo—but, beyond that, his account is not worth serious consideration. Much more worthy of attention, then, is the much more credible attempt at the same task that we owe to Steven Marthinsen. Unlike Tsouras, Marthinsen resorts to neither the creation of a “dream team” in the upper echelons of the Army of the North nor the reinforcement of Napoléon's forces with troops who never existed, but rather sticks firmly to the fundamental realities of the situation. Also absent, meanwhile, are the crushing successes imagined by Tsouras in respect of 16 June, Marthinsen instead initially cleaving to the conventional narrative, albeit in a fashion that is distinctly uncritical (the story that,

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<sup>57</sup> Tsouras, *Napoleon Victorious!*, 96–196.

at the start of the Battle of Waterloo, Mouton's corps was present on the field is, for example, accepted at face value). Not until he reaches the morning of 18 June does this approach change, the crucial figure here being that of Marshal Grouchy. Having reached the village of Walhain, the latter both hears the noise of the initial cannonade and, more importantly, receives word from the commander of one of his two reserve cavalry corps, General Exelmans, that the bulk of the Prussian forces that had spent the previous night bivouacked around Wavre were apparently marching to join Wellington. Too cautious a man to risk his all on information that could yet prove to be incomplete, the marshal nonetheless took a crucial decision in that he ordered Gérard to abandon the direct march on Wavre in which he was currently engaged in favor of a diversion in a northwesterly direction that would enable him to block the most direct road to the battlefield at the village of Lasne; as for his other subordinates, meanwhile, Vandamme and Pajol—the commanders, respectively, of III Corps and I Reserve Cavalry Corps—were told to keep heading for Wavre, and Exelmans to provide a link between Gérard and Vandamme. If this halfway house was scarcely best of the options open to him—there was a clear risk that Gérard's IV Corps could find itself facing the whole of the Prussian Army with little in the way of immediate support—it nonetheless was better than doing nothing and in the event proved to be a moment that changed history.<sup>58</sup>

Devoted to Napoléon and eager to win his marshal's baton, Gérard had no sooner received his orders than he was force-marching

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<sup>58</sup> For the decision at Walhain, see Steven Marthinsen, *Napoleon's Waterloo Campaign: An Alternate History*, vol. 1 (n.p.: XLibris, 2002), 11–19. In respect of Grouchy's failure to act in any such fashion, Gareth Glover offers an intelligent summary: "It is patently clear throughout all the communications between Grouchy and Napoleon that his primary role was to ensure that Blücher and Wellington did not join forces. . . . Simply following the Prussians would not ensure this: only a move to the north-west . . . could have done so. . . . Had he done so . . . he could have . . . prevented all but Bülow's corps from reaching Waterloo, Blücher would undoubtedly have turned upon Grouchy with his remaining forces, but he would certainly have ordered Bülow to continue his attack upon Plancenoit. Thus, Grouchy could have restricted the Prussian support for Wellington at Waterloo to just over 30,000 men." Glover, *Waterloo: Myth and Reality*, 215. That this last would have produced a rather different Waterloo is self-evident, but what is less clear is whether it would have been sufficient to produce a French victory. As Glover goes on to say, in his view this is not the case, but this is obviously so much speculation, the result being that there is certainly room for rival trains of thought.



his corps northwestward. However, he had many kilometers to go, and there was little chance that he could stop the Prussians from reaching the battlefield of Waterloo altogether. That being the case, it was just as well that Napoléon spotted the latter's columns from his headquarters at Rossomme and, having first sent out the stray cavalry divisions of Domon and Subervie, both of which had become detached from their parent corps (respectively, those of Vandamme and Pajol), to check out what he had seen, dispatched Mouton's corps to hold the heights of Agiers against Blücher.<sup>59</sup> This done, the emperor then continued to set in motion the grand plan he had developed for the battle, namely screening Wellington's right with the corps of Reille while crushing his left with that of Drouet. Thanks to Uxbridge's quick thinking, however, the French ruler was frustrated, the charge of the British heavy cavalry temporarily reducing Drouet's four infantry divisions to ruin. Nothing daunted, the emperor started on the task of organizing a fresh attack, only for fresh disaster to strike while his back was turned in the shape of Ney's wrong-headed decision to launch a cavalry attack on the Army of the Netherlands's center-right and thereby deprive him of the powerful mounted strike force on which he had been relying to exploit the success that he was certain this time could not but fall to the much-tried troops of I Corps.<sup>60</sup>

With the time now around 1700 in the afternoon, the Prussians at last chose to put in an appearance. Thus, having passed through Chappelle Saint Lambert and Lasne and advanced through the Bois de Paris, the first elements of Bülow's corps reached the easternmost crest of the heights of Agiers, only immediately to be confronted by Mouton's two infantry divisions and their accompanying artillery

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<sup>59</sup> To reiterate, this episode of the standard narrative is completely incorrect: from neither Rossomme nor La Belle Alliance was it possible to see farther than the crest of the heights of Agiers. That VI Corps, which was not on the field at all at this point but rather some kilometers to the southeast, ended up where Napoléon had supposedly sent it is perfectly true, but only because the latter happened to coincide with the spot on the battlefield at which it happened to appear.

<sup>60</sup> The fact that the cavalry not only should not have been thrown in at this point, but was confronted by an inexpugnable line of squares backed by substantial cavalry support, did not preclude it from performing prodigies of valor, Marthinsen cannot resist including the wholly false but oft-repeated story that one British square was broken and its colors captured and taken back to Napoléon. Marthinsen, *Napoleon's Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 1, 280–82.

batteries. The result was the eruption of a furious fight in which the defenders initially greatly distinguished themselves. However, outnumbered four to one by IV Corps alone, they could not hold their position for long, but, with the Prussians constantly pushing round their flanks, they had no chance but to fall back on Plancenoit. With Ney having lost him all his cavalry as an effective fighting force, I Corps still not ready to renew its attack on Wellington's left, and his entire army in danger of envelopment, had Napoléon been a lesser man, he might have despaired, but, in fact, the crisis merely spurred him to fresh efforts. Sending the Young Guard to assist Mouton with the task of holding Plancenoit, he ordered Ney to seize La Haye Sainte, the fact that the garrison was almost out of ammunition meaning that the marshal was able to achieve success, a triumph that in turn allowed a battery of guns to be dragged up the slopes of Mont Saint-Jean and given the task of pounding the Anglo-Dutch center at close range.

Napoléon's fortitude soon had its reward. Although its presence remained completely unknown to the emperor, who had still not received the messages he had been sent by Grouchy respecting the latter's change of plan, Gérard was now within striking distance of the Prussian line of march at Lasne and he accordingly sent his cavalry division on ahead to tie down the enemy troops in the vicinity—Lieutenant General Georg von Pirch's II Corps—while the rest of his men pushed on apace in their wake. Taken completely by surprise by the sudden appearance of French troops, Pirch responded by deploying his men in line of battle so as to check Gérard, and all might yet have been well for the allied cause, but for the calamitous actions of Blücher's chief of staff, Gneisenau. Deeply suspicious of Wellington, whom he believed to have failed to honor his commitment to give full support to the Prussian Army should it fight at Ligny, and extremely concerned at the prospect of any threat to his communications with the Rhine, Gneisenau rounded on Blücher and bullied the aging husar general into not just diverting Ziethen's I Corps from the more northerly route it was taking to the battlefield so as to support Pirch, but also recalling Bülow from Plancenoit.

The commander of IV Corps being no more enamoured of Wellington than Gneisenau, he was only too eager to comply, an astonished Mouton therefore being able to send a note to Napoléon

advising him that the Prussians were falling back into the Bois de Paris. Meanwhile, it so happened that the emperor had finally been reached by the couriers bringing word that Gérard was marching on Lasne while Vandamme and Pajol attacked such Prussian troops as had been left to hold Wävre. All in all, it was an opportunity that was not to be lost—indeed, one last chance of victory. All that was left to Napoléon were the twin divisions of grenadiers and chasseurs of the Imperial Guard, and not even all of them, 2 of their 15 battalions having been sent to relieve the pressure on the defenders of Plancenoit and another kept back to protect the imperial general headquarters at Rossomme. Yet, 12 battalions of the most experienced and enthusiastic troops in the Army of the North was a still sizeable resource and one that could achieve great things, the emperor having perhaps learned a lesson from Borodino, a fight in which he had arguably thrown away his last hope of attaining victory over Alexander I by holding back the guard instead of throwing them into battle at the moment that the Russians started to withdraw. Very soon, then, two lines of battalion columns, each five abreast, were marching across the valley bottom to the left of the Brussels highway, supported farther east by the few troops in Drouet's corps—the infantry division of Durutte and the cavalry division of General Jaquinot—that were still in good order, and to their left rear by such men of the army's heavy cavalry as retained sufficient stamina and good order to mount another attack.

It was a last throw, but it was enough: virtually every formation in Wellington's forces had suffered heavy casualties, much of the artillery was out of ammunition, and morale even among some of the British troops, let alone their foreign comrades in arms, was at a low ebb. Victory was not achieved without hard fighting and many of the defenders showed great courage, but in the end it was all too much: Wellington's weak left wing was pushed back by Durutte, while the two divisions of infantry of the guard routed his center, the coup de grâce being delivered by a brigade of French cavalry that had only played a secondary role in the attacks of the afternoon and now caught the 52d Foot in flank when wheeled out of line to rescue its neighbors, Maitland's Foot Guards, from certain destruction.

By 2100 in the evening, then, Wellington's army was in full flight, covered only by Sir Henry Clinton's little-engaged 2d Division. And

in full flight, too, was the Napoleonic eagle, albeit in a very different sense. Eight kilometers to the east at Lasne, Gérard had for the past few hours been holding the heights to the southeast of the village against frenzied assaults by wave after wave of Prussian troops that included elements of no fewer than three corps. Despite his best efforts, his assailants had eventually secured a foothold on the crest—he was, after all, outnumbered as much as four to one—but, no sooner had Gneisenau heard of Wellington's defeat than the Prussian chief of staff ordered the troops facing the French to abandon the heights and retire across the little river that ran through Lasne, an operation that, predictably enough, broke down in chaos when a chance howitzer shell set fire to the wooden bridge that was the only way to safety, several thousand Prussian soldiers therefore being taken prisoner. Even this was not the end of what had turned into a truly disastrous day for the allies. Thus, at Wavre, desultory fighting had been continuing for much of the afternoon with little to show for it for either side, but the gathering dusk had allowed Grouchy to mass the cavalry of Pajol and Exelmans in the woods cloaking the bridge across the river Dyle at Limale, and as night fell so the French horsemen were able to burst out of their cover and put the terrified defenders to flight with the loss of yet more unhappy captives.<sup>61</sup>

So much for Marthinsen's reconstruction of the battle; although this is but the first half of it, a second volume going on to lay out at great length how the next day saw the victorious Army of the North mass all its forces against the demoralized Prussians and crush them in their turn. To what extent, however, is it a plausible recasting of events? At first sight, this question cannot but elicit a more positive response than the one elicited by Tsouras's efforts. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the current author is convinced that, properly managed, the attack of the guard could have broken Wellington's line, while Marthinsen restricts the necessary changes in the narrative to just one thing, namely an alternative outcome to the famous dispute between Grouchy and Gérard as to whether all or some of the former's command should march to the support of Napoléon. Yet, it remains very difficult to agree with at least some aspects of the story. Given that he was both notoriously combative

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<sup>61</sup> Marthinsen, *Napoleon's Waterloo Campaign*, vol. 1, 183–435.

and absolutely determined not to let down Wellington, the idea that Blücher could have been persuaded to order Bülow to abandon the attack on Plancenoit seems particularly far-fetched, while such is the distance from Walhain to the crucial point of Limale that it is difficult to see how troops starting from the former village at mid-day could possibly have reached the latter before, at the very earliest, 1900 in the evening.<sup>62</sup>

But there is yet enough verisimilitude to make it necessary to give Marthinsen's *Napoleon's Waterloo Campaign: An Alternate History* something more than just the time of day. We come here to another use of the wargame, in brief its employment as a means of testing out potential ways by which the actual course of events could have been changed. Insofar as the events of 18 June 1815 are concerned, in this respect we have an ideal tool in the Grand Waterloo scenario offered in Decision Games' reissue of Napoleon's Last Battles, this being a reconstruction that allows players to recreate the actions of Grouchy as well as those of Wellington, Blücher, and Napoléon within the parameters of a gaming system that is widely recognized as being one of the most fluent and accessible in the entire field.<sup>63</sup> Herewith, then, an account of a game based on the scenario that accepts the premise that Grouchy sent Gérard to march to the sound of the guns while using the forces of Vandamme, Exelmans, and Pajol to execute the charge he had originally been given of marching on Wavre. Rules were exactly as those stipulated in the Decision Games' package, with the exception that artillery were allowed to bombard château hexes (given that Hougomont was set ablaze by French artillery fire, the prohibition of this tactic seems absurd). Other changes, by contrast, rather referred to the starting positions of various units; Gé-

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<sup>62</sup> For a highly informed discussion of Grouchy's options, see Stephen Millar, "My Duty Is to Execute the Emperor's Orders': Grouchy at Walhain, 18 June 1815," *Napoleon-Series.org*, August 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Using, as they do, the campaign variant of the system employed by Napoleon's Last Battles, Grand Waterloo and its counterpart, Grand Ligny, are slightly more complicated than the scenarios for the individual battles in that they introduce rules for command and control. It is the experience of the author, however, that these can be omitted with little in the way of deleterious effect: such is the density of the units of the rival armies at Mont Saint-Jean that most of them are in command at all times and can therefore be used freely. Meanwhile, if the greater dispersion characteristic of the eastern sector of the theater of operations means that the issue is more of a problem there, its impact is in practice still quite limited.

rard's corps, whose deployment area is given as the area due north of Walhain on the main road from Gembloux (its starting point) to Wavre, was rather set up much farther west (and therefore much closer to the Waterloo battlefield), for to do otherwise would have prevented it from reaching Lasne until very late in the day; equally, Mouton's corps was positioned not in reserve immediately in rear of Napoléon's center but some way to his right rear in the vicinity of the village of Hute.<sup>64</sup>

To proceed with the refight, the action began with the rival armies deployed as they were at midday on the actual day. Let us start with events at Mont Saint-Jean. Here, exactly as was the case in reality, Napoléon began the day by sending Reille's corps to contain Wellington's right wing while that of Drouet marched on his left. Needless to say, Reille's advance soon led to fierce fighting at Hougomont, but it quickly became clear that the epicenter of the action was going to be Papelotte, where Reille was quickly joined by Milhaud's corps of reserve cavalry. For several hours, there was a seemingly endless series of attacks and counterattacks in which the settlement changed hands on numerous occasions, but by 1700 in the afternoon, the French had finally succeeded in establishing definitive control of the blazing ruins. Had things gone to plan, victory at Papelotte should have been exploited by Mouton's VI Corps, which since the start of the battle had been wending its way northward from Hute, but, just as it arrived in Drouet's rear, the cavalry divisions of Domon and Subervie discovered that there were Prussian cavalry in the Bois de Paris just off to the right. Further investigation quickly proving that the troops concerned were the vanguard of an entire Prussian corps—that of Bülow—Mouton therefore hastily turned off into the woods and prepared to fend off the new arrivals.

If the French were clearly now in some trouble, they were not dismayed, Napoléon sending the Young Guard to support Mouton and the cavalry of the guard to support Drouet. Nothing daunted, meanwhile, the latter mounted a fresh attack that drove back the

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<sup>64</sup> The head start afforded to Gérard in this change may be justified by reference to Marthinsen's insistence that he and his corps would have force-marched to their objective, this being something for which there is no provision in the rules for Napoleon's Last Battles. As for Mouton, the fact that he was not present on the battlefield at the beginning of the action is very clear.

Anglo-Dutch left for some distance and established his troops on the eastern crest of Mont Saint-Jean. At the same time, meanwhile, help was at hand. Having driven his men extremely hard, Gérard had come within striking distance of the key objective of Lasne, the rear-most elements of Bülow's corps therefore finding themselves under attack from his cavalry at about the same time as Papelotte was finally falling into the hands of Drouet. In the event, however, the arrival of Gérard did not presage victory. Initially, true enough, many of Bülow's troops turned aside to secure the village of Lasne, but enough of them continued to fight in the Bois de Paris to ensure that neither Mouton nor the Young Guard could move to support Drouet, and, by 1900, the latter had in effect been fought to a standstill. As for Gérard, it was soon abundantly clear that he was in desperate trouble, for Pirch's II Corps had been following in the wake of that of Bülow, and this force—some 25,000 men—now closed in on his exposed right flank. With Gérard possessed of no more than his own 13,000 men, plus Exelmans's reserve cavalry corps, which had marched to the sound of the guns from the position in which it had been seeking to keep open a link between the widely separated corps of Gérard and Vandamme, he therefore had little chance of holding his own, while there was no hope of any further help reaching him from elsewhere (Napoléon, of course, was fully occupied with his battle against Wellington while the remainder of Grouchy's command—the corps of Vandamme and Pajol—were observing the Prussian troops who had been left to hold Wavre). Fighting hard, Gérard and Exelmans managed to maintain some sort of defensive line, but they were steadily driven back along the road by which they had come and, by the time night fell (around 2100), they were on the brink of complete defeat. At Mont Saint-Jean, Napoléon was in a much better state—the corps of Drouet, Reille, Kellermann, and Milhaud were all still intact, as, indeed, was the guard, but, Wellington's army, if badly battered, was scarcely beaten, while the arrival of Ziethen's Prussian corps before Papelotte signified even to the emperor that the day was lost, all that was left to him being to order his troops to disengage and withdraw to the safety of the French frontier in the hope something could be saved from the wreck of the campaign.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Napoléon being the man he was, it is, of course, entirely possible that, as at Leipzig

As can be seen from this account, Marthinsen's version of the Battle of Waterloo is sadly misjudged. Even had Gérard been able to get his corps into action in the vicinity of Lasne by 1700 in the afternoon (something that would have required a considerable feat of endurance from troops who had already been marching and fighting for three days without a break), he would soon have been facing two or even three corps of Prussian troops with only minimal assistance from his own side, and that without much effect on the situation beyond the heights of Agiers. Meanwhile, as for this last, Napoléon clearly had only a minimal chance of breaking Wellington's army, while, even were he to manage to do so, he would still face the task of taking on the Prussians, a force that even with their many losses still outnumbered him by at least three to two. Nor would things have been made any easier had Grouchy marched on Lasne with his full force, for the corps left to hold Wavre under Thielmann would then in all probability have marched to join the rest of Blücher's army. Play the cards available to Napoléon as one will, then, the result remains failure, the fact being that, given the situation that pertained on the morning of 18 June 1815, he simply did not have sufficient troops to do more than secure the most limited of tactical victories. Of course, defeat of the sort seen in our refight of the battle would not have brought about the end of the war, for Napoléon would still have had an army in being, but, to make the same point yet again, this would scarcely have been sufficient to deter his enemies from closing in and overwhelming him a second time. In *Napoleon, France and Waterloo*, the current author argues that a defeat for Wellington at Mont Saint-Jean would merely have seen that commander pull back to the impregnable haven of Antwerp and Blücher retire on the Rhine, while the Austrians and Russians poured across the frontier further south in overwhelming numbers.<sup>66</sup> This, perhaps, must remain a matter of

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in 1813, he would have ordered his army to hold its positions in the hope that he could somehow yet have rescued something from the situation. However, with the Army of the North divided into three widely separated segments—those of Napoléon at La Belle Alliance, Gérard southeast of Lasne, and Vandamme at Wavre—and Wellington certain of reinforcements in the shape of the 17,000 troops who had been left at Halle, that anything could have come of this is highly unlikely, the most probable outcome being the smashing allied victory predicted by Andrew Uffindell. See footnote 52.

<sup>66</sup> This analysis discounts, of course, the idea that the Seventh Coalition would have fractured in the event of a French victory, the result being a series of peace treaties



## Chapter 8

contention, but, if so, it matters not, what counts here being rather the manner in which properly constructed historical simulations such as Grand Waterloo tend to suggest that the idea that 18 June 1815 could ever have produced anything other than a marginal French victory is one that is in reality confined to the realms of fantasy.

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that would have kept Napoléon on the throne, but it is the view of the current author that the chances of any such an eventuality actually taking place were little better than zero. See Charles J. Esdaile, *Napoleon, France and Waterloo* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2016), 24–53.

## Historical Hexagons (4)



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon's Last Battles, the situation at midday on 18 June. With Mouton's command badly delayed by the heavy rain of the previous 24 hours, Napoléon is desperately short of troops at Mont Saint-Jean, while, with Grouchy still far to the south of them, Blücher's army is already well on the way to the battlefield.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon's Last Battles, the situation at Mont Saint-Jean at the start of the action. The absence of Mouton's command from the French center is painfully apparent.

## Chapter 8



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon's Last Battles, midafternoon at Mont Saint-Jean. The French have seized Papelotte, but Mouton is still making his way onto the battlefield.



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

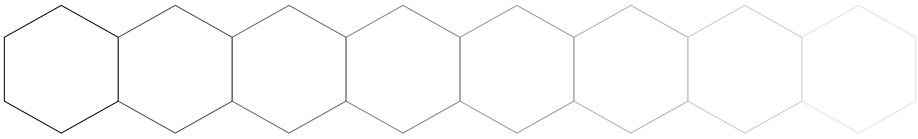
Napoleon's Last Battles, late afternoon. Bülow's corps has been checked by Mouton and Wellington's left wing driven in, but Gérard's corps is only just beginning to arrive in the vicinity, while the corps of Ziethen and Pirch are well on their way to the battle at Mont Saint-Jean. Far to the east, meanwhile, Thielmann's corps is containing the corps of Vandammes, Pajol, and Exelmans at Limale and Wavre.

*Historical Hexagons (4)*



*Author's collection, adapted by MCUP*

Napoleon's Last Battles, early evening. Napoléon has made further progress against Wellington's left flank, while Gérard has succeeded in pulling much of IV Corps away from the battle at Mont Saint-Jean, but the latter is now menaced by the arrival of Pirch's II Corps. Note, too, the proximity of Ziethen's I Corps.



## *Conclusion*

# Some Thoughts on the Wargame as a Research Tool

What, then, have we learned from this study of the ways in which, and means by which, Waterloo has been wargamed since the early 1960s, the moment when such a project was first attempted? Insofar as this is concerned, there have been two variations: tabletop representations with large numbers of brightly painted miniatures and map-based historical simulations. Of these, it is the latter that is by far the more practical and likely to deliver satisfactory results, and the author has therefore had no hesitation in making it the chief focus of this work, and all the more so as those interested in following up its ideas should have no difficulty in acquiring at least some of the products discussed in its pages. For this, meanwhile, there is an added reason. Such is the attraction of collecting and playing with toy soldiers—artifacts that are, after all, both extremely attractive and emotionally engaging—it can be assumed that, in however niche a capacity, the miniatures game is likely to survive for the foreseeable future, but the same is not true of the tabletop game Waterloo and its many successors. In this age of information technology, there are alternative ways of recreating large-scale military operations, which are seemingly faster, more efficient and, above all, infinitely more exciting than maneuvering hundreds of cardboard counters over a paper map, and all the signs are that historical simulation of the sort discussed here is likely to be on its way out as a means of examining the past, its devotees having been shown by various studies to be clustered overwhelmingly in the generation born, like the author, in the period 1950–60 (as is the case with miniatures gamers, they are also overwhelmingly white, male, and either college-educated or

## Conclusion

possess experience in the military).<sup>1</sup> That new products—12 on the Hundred Days alone in the past 10 years—continue to appear on the market is encouraging, but, even so, it is hard to imagine the future being anything other than rather dark, and that despite the fact that board wargames actually offer many advantages over the computer variety that have steadily been supplanting them. *Wargaming Waterloo*, then, is offered, not just as a work of investigation, but also as a historical record, albeit one tinged with a considerable dose of nostalgia, of what is all too likely to be a lost pastime. All the more is this necessary as what is under threat is actually a cultural phenomenon that has few parallels. To quote the editors of *Zones of Control*:

Wargames are unquestionably the most sophisticated ludic productions ever attempted in paper or predigital form. . . . The single largest extant corpus of coherent exemplars whereby the complexity (and chaos) of lived experience is reduced to ludic systems and procedures, surely a resource worth our attention and enquiry.<sup>2</sup>

If the future of manual historical simulation is likely to be the proverbial chronicle of a death foretold, this is much to be lamented, for it is by no means to be scorned as a means of gaining a greater understanding of the battles and campaigns of the past. Thus, the fundamental parameters of the art of making war—chance, time, space, resources, technology, and geography—are all present in the products of Avalon Hill, SPI, and their many fellows, while, exactly as is the case in reality, victory depends on the successful manipulation and juxtaposition of all the different elements concerned. That many important factors are missing is undeniable—unlike the real-life situations they seek to recreate, outings of Waterloo and its fellows are devoid of any political context, while cardboard counters are (at least in the absence of special provision) ever steadfast in the performance of their duty, said special provision also being neces-

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Freeman, *The Complete Book of Wargames* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, ed., *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), xvii, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10329.001.0001>.

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sary to conjure up some semblance of the fog of war—but, even so, it is difficult to see how so much could be derived from other means, the one exception being the sort of kriegsspiel-derived committee games pioneered by the late Paddy Griffith.<sup>3</sup> To claim that the experience places those who seek it in the shoes of Wellington or Napoléon would be ridiculous; the former, in particular, fought his battle on horseback from the very midst of his army's front line under a constant rain of shot and shell that led to the death or injury of most of his personal staff, while, as noted above, wargames of whatever sort are generally very bad at recreating the ignorance and uncertainty by which both he and his French opponent were constantly beset. And yet there is probably no better way of understanding both their decisions and the difficulties under which they were laboring; if one sees but through a glass darkly, see one yet does. In the words of Peter P. Perla, "Although many artificialities limit the ability of a wargame to simulate the decision-making environment of a combat situation realistically, there are many aspects of a commander's operational activities that wargames can reproduce with a surprising degree of fidelity."<sup>4</sup>

At this point, it is important to make a vital caveat. Historical simulations are dependent for their success on the work of their designers. As much at risk of personal prejudice as any other practitioners of the historical art, these last have the capacity to skew the packages generated by their work to such an extent that in the end they serve only to obfuscate and mislead. This, of course, can cut both ways: mesmerized by the figure of Napoléon, one designer might accord him powers of command and control that are equivalent to twice or three times the amount accorded to Wellington, or give the Old Guard the striking power of a World War II German panzer division, while devotees of the thin red line might just as easily decide that, in all normal circumstances, British infantry should be all but impossible to overcome. In *Napoleon Returns*, for example, the desperately outnumbered French Army of the North is accorded a combat capacity that is not far short of its combined Prussian

<sup>3</sup> For a useful introduction, see Paddy G. Griffith, *How to Design and Play Historical War Council Games* (Nuneaton, UK: Paddy Griffith Associates, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Peter P. Perla, *The Art of Wargaming: A Guide for Professionals and Hobbyists* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 366.

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and Anglo-Dutch opponents. Foibles of this sort, of course, cannot but undermine any hope of achieving a reasonable degree of historical simulation, and yet, such is the fascination exerted by the myths in question, they can often slip through without challenge. To this, of course, is added the problem presented by the issue of the game, or, to put it another way, the idea of a contest that both sides have an equal chance of winning. Given that all the evidence suggests that, in the circumstances that actually pertained on the morning of 18 June 1815, it would have been extremely difficult for Napoléon to triumph at Waterloo, a strong temptation exists to give the French a greater chance, by, for example, loosening Wellington's hold on Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte. Such an inclination, meanwhile, is rendered all the greater by the pro-French tendencies of much of the target audience, many Americans and even some Britons being slaves to the Napoleonic legend, and consequently desperately anxious to have the chance to rewrite history in favor of their hero. That said, it is not always the French cause that benefits from such tergiversation, one issue that is particularly prominent here being the question of precisely when the oncoming legions of Marshal Blücher made their presence felt on the battlefield. Ever since the construction of William Siborne's great diorama, controversy has raged in respect of this subject, and numerous designers have responded to the frequent allegation that British writers have regularly downplayed Prussian participation in the battle by advancing the time of their arrival by two or three hours.<sup>5</sup> Finally, it is but fair to remember that we are dealing with a medium to which the precise reconstruction of events is anathema. As Jon Freeman has written,

In a hopelessly narrow sense, a game stops simulating the battle as it was actually fought as soon as a single

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, a new Waterloo diorama is under construction that seeks to avoid the overtly Anglo-centric focus of Siborne's work by setting its timing at around 1700 in the afternoon, a moment specially chosen because, what with heroic British squares standing firm against French cavalry, French cuirassiers thundering up the slopes of Mont Saint-Jean, German riflemen grimly clinging on to Mont Saint-Jean, and thousands of Prussians battling their way to Plancenoit, citizens of all the main participants in the battle, not to mention their respective militaries, can find something in it to satisfy national pride. At the size of a tennis court when finished, it will be the largest such model ever made. See "Waterloo Remodelled," National Army Museum, accessed 22 May 2022.



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piece is moved to a location never occupied by the real army . . . to which it corresponds. Such a strict definition, however, makes a simulation *game* an impossibility since a game without options—like poker played with a stacked deck—isn't really a game at all.<sup>6</sup>

If designers can skew their products, they can themselves be skewed. Thus, the most diligent and painstaking historical research is of no account if the sources on which it is based are unreliable. In this respect, the best example by far is the treatment of the two infantry and two cavalry divisions commanded during the battle by General Mouton. From time immemorial, these have been regarded as part of Napoléon's reserve, and, as such, game designers have invariably depicted them as having been deployed where the emperor could have been assumed to have positioned them, namely in rear of his center, the same place, in fact, in which they are portrayed as occupying in maps of the battle. Yet, while it is impossible to be certain, such evidence as we have suggests that Mouton and his men were still kilometers from the battlefield when the battle began, and, further, that when they finally turned up, it was nowhere near where it has been commonly supposed. The result, of course, has been greatly to augment the striking power of the French forces at the outset of the battle and thereby increase the chance of them overcoming Wellington's army before the arrival of the Prussians. These issues specifically relate to Waterloo, but they are a problem that operates across the board. In the words of the author of *Simulating War*:

Historical sources have two major problems from a simulations-design perspective. First, one soon discovers that their reliability on the kind of specific details needed for wargames design is shaky to say the least, [for] . . . they are often riddled with factual errors and disagreements, as Parsall and Tully make remorselessly clear when they identify nine pervasive myths in previous historiography concerning the Battle of Midway. Secondly, historical sources (especially secondary ones) naturally tend to focus much

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<sup>6</sup> Freeman, *The Complete Book of Wargames*, 31–32.

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more on the factors and events which made a crucial difference in reality than on giving a more balanced overview of what might have mattered had the battle taken a different course. . . . Counter-factual studies . . . help to some extent [here], but even they tend to pursue specific alternate strands rather than providing the generic wargame data that wargame designers really need.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, serious as these problems are, they do not nullify the value of historical simulation as a research tool, the fact being that, as witness the discussion of Napoleon at Waterloo, many of them can be easily rectified, whether it is by providing garrisons for Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte, relegating Mouton to his correct position far to the rear or modifying the arrival time of the Prussians (a much harder task, of course, is that of correcting the errors, many of them deeply ingrained, from which they stem, but a start has at least been made on this via such books as Gareth Glover's *Waterloo: Myth and Reality* and the author's own *Walking Waterloo*). On the contrary, a well-constructed game can act as a sharp antidote to romance and whimsy: arguable, though it is, that the La Belle Alliance scenario from Napoleon's Last Battles is actually much too hard on the French, having played it through, it is difficult to see how anyone can be left with the impression that the Army of the Netherlands would have undoubtedly been overcome had it not been for the arrival of the Prussians; equally, only the most dyed-in-the-wool Bonapartist could possibly reject the overwhelming evidence that victory at Waterloo would not have secured the throne of France for Napoléon afforded by the 1815 scenario of War and Peace. And, finally, as witness the example of Napoleon at Waterloo, even a somewhat problematic offering can be modified in such a way as to turn it into a useful means of investigating why the chances of the emperor triumphing over Wellington and Blücher were so slim.

To write thus is to imply that the object of historical simulation is more than anything else to seek to recreate reality—in this instance,

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games* (London: Continuum, 2012), 48–49.

## Conclusion

to have Napoléon take on Wellington with no more troops than he actually had available at La Belle Alliance at 1130 in the morning of 18 June 1815. This, however, is not the only way the ludography can be manipulated. To quote Jon Freeman again:

The last day of the battle of Waterloo might have gone very differently had Grouchy not spent the previous day wandering all over the countryside looking for the defeated but regrouping Prussian army. An obvious alternative, then, would be to refight the day . . . under the assumption that Blücher's Prussians were not available to reinforce Wellington's army.<sup>8</sup>

Quite so, though the nonarrival of the Prussians is but one of the various scenarios that have been put forward as potential means whereby the judgment of history could have been reversed. Nor, indeed, is it the one that is most popular with devotees of Napoléon, the holy grail of these last rather consisting of not just the absence of Blücher's army but the appearance of Grouchy's command—two infantry and two cavalry corps—on the battlefield sufficiently early in the day for the emperor to have still been able to take advantage of this sudden reinforcement. As any of the packages we have reviewed will show, such an occurrence would have threatened the Army of the Netherlands with annihilation, always assuming, that is, that Wellington made no response other than passively to await destruction (a proven master, after all, of the art of tactical retreat, in such a case the Iron Duke would almost certainly have slipped away to the safety of Antwerp). However, even setting aside what we can assume to have been Wellington's likely reaction, such an event is inconceivable, it being most unlikely that, left entirely uncontained, the Prussians would have sat quietly at Wavre while the Anglo-Dutch battled on alone at Mont Saint-Jean: after all, menaced though he was by Grouchy's entire command, Blücher had no hesitation in marching on Plancenoit with three of his four corps. This sort of nonsense is therefore best avoided—as Freeman says, “A game must represent the possibilities of the engagement.”<sup>9</sup> But, even so, there still remains the possibility

<sup>8</sup> Freeman, *The Complete Book of Wargames*, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Freeman, *The Complete Book of Wargames*, 32.

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that, far away at Walhain, Grouchy might have acceded to the pleas of his subordinates to hasten to the assistance of his imperial master with at least some of his forces. That this is within the bounds of plausibility is beyond doubt, but whether it held the slightest risk to the allied cause is quite another, the only way this can be checked out being through some variant of the experiment that we have conducted using the appropriate scenario of Napoleon's Last Battles.

This brings us, of course, to the lessons that we have learned from this long examination of the ludography. Insofar as these are concerned, the verdict seems pretty clear. In the first place, even with the situation as it actually was on the morning of 18 June 1815, Napoléon could have secured a victory, albeit one that was at best marginal and wide open to being overturned the following day, or, failing that, to have escaped complete defeat by retreating from the field before the Prussian presence became completely overwhelming. In the second, with better staff work and more judicious decision-making on his own part, the emperor could probably have reached his initial goal of Brussels, albeit without inflicting sufficient damage on his opponents to knock either of them out of the campaign. In the third, assuming that the war carried on—something with which it is very difficult to argue—the “flight of the eagle” was most unlikely to have had a happy ending for the French ruler. And, finally, Marshal Grouchy, the man who after 1815 more than anyone else was pilloried for his imperial master's defeat, was wholly innocent, Napoléon's initial orders in respect of the pursuit of the Prussians having taken him so far to the east that, even had he hastened to the help of the forces assaulting Mont Saint-Jean the moment he first heard the sounds of battle, he could at best have hoped to divert some of the Prussians marching on Plancenoit from their objective, this being something that would in reality have been of limited relevance given that the troops most likely to be affected, namely Pirch's II Corps, played no more than a supporting role in the battle.

The utility of wargaming as a tool of historical research is therefore immediately made apparent. In the instance of a hypothetical decision on the part of Marshal Grouchy to march to join Napoléon, for example, the issue is one of space and time, or, to put it another way, the establishment of whether a large body of troops could have covered a particular distance over a particular terrain in a particular

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time. However, to write thus is to risk ignoring the big picture, which is, as Robert Citino has pointed out, “the utility of the wargame as a visual and tactile representation of the real life event,” the fact being that “simply setting the game up . . . and deploying the at-start orders of battle for both sides can be enough to tell a researcher a great deal about the battle, campaign or war under investigation.” To continue with Citino, meanwhile, historical simulation has two further advantages in respect of the study of war in that it is a natural introduction, first, to the trilogy of tactical, operational, and strategic, and, second, to the dichotomy between the theory that generalship is a science and the reality that it is in large part a game of chance. As he concludes, then, “May I offer the following advice to any military historian seeking to learn more about a battle, campaign or war of the past? Get serious: play a game!”<sup>10</sup> Readers who have borne with the author will scarcely need to be persuaded by such sentiments, but, beyond the niche market that they represent, the latter are likely to be greeted with a mixture of suspicion, surprise, and hostility even by those genuinely interested in the history of the art of war. That this is the case is recognized by Philip Sabin:

Sceptics often see gaming as a rather trivial and childish activity, and are reluctant to accept that it has anything serious to contribute alongside more traditional ways of studying the complexities of warfare. This stigmatisation has helped to drive hobby wargamers “into the closet”, and has hindered the development of effective synergies between professional and recreational wargaming.<sup>11</sup>

To this, however, Sabin has an answer, and an answer, moreover that, as is the case for his *Simulating War*, cannot be bettered as a conclusion to the current work. As he goes on to write:

I hope that this book will go some way to deepen awareness of this extensive and neglected body of materials and techniques, and that others will be inspired to exploit the very significant active learning potential of

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<sup>10</sup> For these views, see Robert M. Citino, “Lessons from the Hexagon: Wargames and the Military Historian,” in Harrigan and Kirschenbaum, *Zones of Control*, 439–46.

<sup>11</sup> Sabin, *Simulating War*, 259.

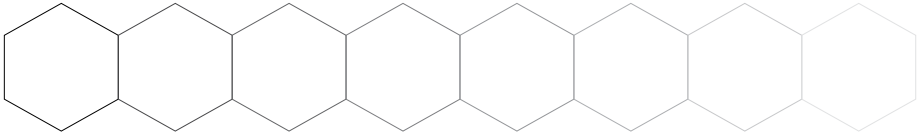
## *Conclusion*

wargames as I myself have come to do. If Clausewitz were alive today, I think that he would see wargaming as an even closer analogue than a game of cards to the conflict dynamics that he analysed with such insight two centuries ago.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sabin, *Simulating War*, 259.





## *Appendix A*

# Suggested Amendments for Napoleon at Waterloo<sup>1</sup>

The point has repeatedly been made that, as published, *Napoleon at Waterloo* contains numerous errors that enormously reduce its value as a simulation. Herewith, then, the series of amendments that were introduced to remedy the situation.

1. The battle is deemed to begin at 1200 rather than 1300. Consideration might also be given to ending it at 2100 rather than 2200.
2. Infantry (but not cavalry or artillery) are permitted to enter woods hexes at the cost of an extra movement point per hex.
3. Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, and Papelotte are all designated as fortified hexes, thereby tripling the combat value of any occupants. Troops garrisoning them are never required to attack enemy units that are in contact with them and ignore “defender retreat” results.
4. To reflect the importance of the use of combined arms, attacks involving infantry, cavalry, and artillery are resolved on the next highest line of the combat results table (i.e., a 1:1 attack now becomes a 2:1 attack).
5. Cavalry contacted by infantry alone may always withdraw one hex. In such cases, the infantry concerned will halt at the point of contact.

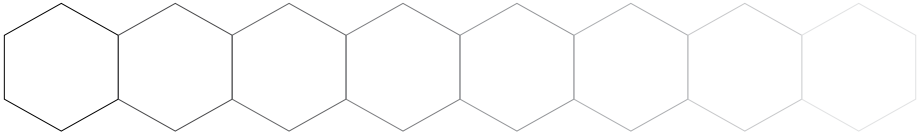
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<sup>1</sup> This appendix is based on Rob Gibson, “Improving the Basic *Napoleon at Waterloo*,” *Phoenix*, no. 3 (October/November 1976). Revisions have been made to the original content to accommodate current requirements for grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and to be consistent with use in the main text.



## *Appendix A*

6. Detachment (i.e., 1-4) units should be provided for Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, and Papelotte. Consideration should also be given to placing a 1-4 unit in the wooded hexes adjacent to Hougoumont.
7. The French artillery positions marked at hexes 1411 and 1511 are ignored, and the I Corps artillery placed at hex 1514 and the guard artillery at hex 1415. Meanwhile, note that the I Corps and II Corps artillery pieces have been transposed: it is the latter that should be at hex 0915 rather than the former.
8. The French infantry division stationed at hex 1714 should be moved to hex 1713.
9. The units belonging to VI Corps and the forces attached thereto (those marked as being placed in hexes 1315, 1316, 1414, 1415, and 1515) should be kept off the board at the start of the game, entering at 1400 at hex 2065. Note that the two infantry divisions have been wrongly labeled as belonging to II Corps.
10. The optional rules governing the arrival of Blücher and Grouchy should be ignored: under all circumstances, the former's troops will begin to enter the board at 1700 (see below) and the latter omitted from play.
11. In the real battle, while they eventually released the troops concerned, both Wellington and Napoléon kept considerable forces in reserve. In consequence, the infantry divisions on Wellington's right flank at hexes 0310 and 0509 cannot be moved until 1500, while, of the Imperial Guard, only the artillery may move at the start of the battle, the cavalry not being available until 1500, the Young Guard not until 1700 and, the chasseurs and grenadiers not until 1800.
12. The arrival of the Prussians is put back to 1700 and is then broken down into three tranches, namely 1700: 13/IV, 14/IV, and IVC (hex 2312); 1800: 15/IV, 16/IV, and IV artillery (hex 2312); 1900: 5/II, 6/II, 7/II, IIC, II artillery (2312) and 1/I, 3/I, I artillery, IC, and IIIC (hexes 2307, 2308 or 2309).



## *Appendix B*

# A Ludography of Waterloo<sup>1</sup>

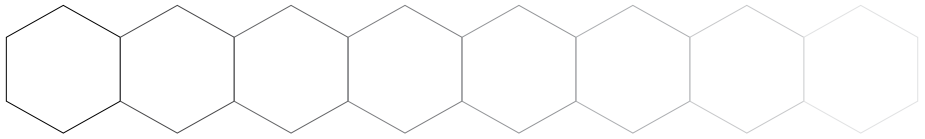
- Waterloo (Avalon Hill Game, 1962), operational: satisfaction 5.9, complexity 2.19.
- Napoleon at Waterloo (Simulations Publications, 1971; subsequently Victory Games), tactical: satisfaction 6.7, complexity 1.9.
- Napoléon: The Waterloo Campaign, 1815 (Gamma-Two Games, 1974; subsequently Columbia Games), operational: satisfaction 7.4, complexity 2.48.
- 1815: The Waterloo Campaign (Game Designers' Workshop, 1975), operational: satisfaction 6.4, complexity 2.46.
- Napoleon's Last Battles (Simulations Publications, 1976; subsequently Decision Games), tactical/operational: satisfaction 7.2, complexity 2.43.
- Wellington's Victory: The Battle of Waterloo, 18 June 1815 (Simulations Publications, 1976; subsequently Decision Games), tactical: satisfaction 6.2, complexity 4.
- Hundred Days' Battles (Operational Studies Group, 1979), operational: satisfaction 5.9, complexity 2.7.
- War and Peace (Avalon Hill Game, 1980), strategic: satisfaction 6.7, complexity 3.3.
- Hougoumont: Rock of Waterloo (*Command* magazine, 1991), tactical: satisfaction 6.6, complexity 2.6.
- La Bataille de Mont Saint Jean (Clash of Arms Games, 1993), tactical: satisfaction 6.7, complexity 4.05.
- The Battles of Waterloo (GMT Games, 1994), tactical: satisfaction 6.5, complexity 3.39.

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<sup>1</sup> The ratings given in this list are those generated by gamer opinion as expressed via the Boardgames Geek website. *Satisfaction* is rated out of 10 and *complexity* out of 5.

## Appendix B

- Waterloo, 1815 (Dragon, 1996), tactical: satisfaction 7.1, complexity 4.18.
- The Last Days of the Grande Armée: The Four Days of Waterloo (Operational Studies Group, 1998), tactical/operational: satisfaction 6.5, complexity 3.07.
- Waterloo: Napoleon's Last Battle (Phalanx Games, 2002), tactical: satisfaction 6.1, complexity 2.76.
- Vive l'Empereur! (Giogames, 2003), tactical: satisfaction 6.7, complexity 2.5.
- Waterloo 20 (Victory Point Games, 2008), operational: satisfaction 7, complexity 2.22.
- “La Garde recule!” (Against the Odds; subsequently Turning Point Simulations, 2011), tactical: satisfaction 5.4, complexity 1.55.
- Crisis on the Right: Plancenoit 1815 (White Dog Games, 2014), tactical: satisfaction 7.3, complexity n/r.
- Waterloo: Enemy Mistakes (Pendragon Game Studio, 2015), tactical: satisfaction 6.6, complexity 3.6.
- Waterloo: Quelle Affaire! (River Horse, 2015), tactical: satisfaction 7.5, complexity 2.22.
- Waterloo 1815: Fallen Eagles (Hexasim, 2015), tactical: satisfaction 8.3, complexity 2.96.
- Napoleon Returns, 1815 (Worthington Publishing, 2015), operational: satisfaction 7.6, complexity 1.89.
- Les cent-heures du Waterloo: la campagne de Belgique (*Vae Victis* magazine, 2015), operational: satisfaction 5.9, complexity 2.
- Napoleon's Last Gamble: Battles of the Hundred Days (Operational Studies Group, 2016), tactical/operational: satisfaction 8.4, complexity 3.08.
- Waterloo 1815: Napoleon's Last Battle (Trafalgar Editions, 2016), tactical: satisfaction 8.4, complexity 4.14.
- Waterloo Campaign 1815 (*C3i* magazine, 2019), operational: satisfaction 7.4, complexity 2.1.
- The Day of Waterloo: 1815 AD (Turning Point Simulations, 2019), tactical: satisfaction 7.3, complexity 3.5.
- A Hard Pounding Fight: The Battle for La Haye Sainte (Turning Point Simulations, 2019), tactical: satisfaction 6.3, complexity n/r.
- Hougoumont: Key to Waterloo, 18 June 1815 (Decision Games, 2021), tactical: satisfaction 7.2, complexity 2.5



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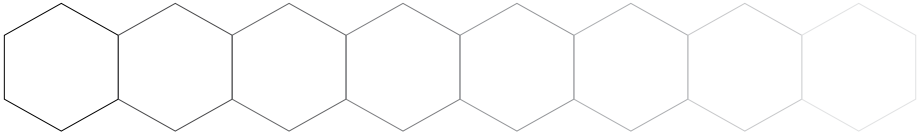
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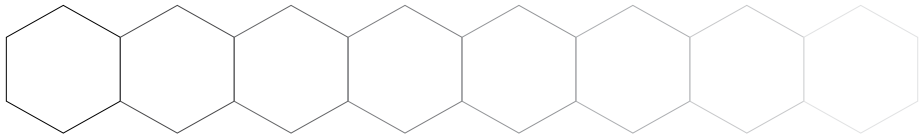
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Charles J. Esdaile was born in Epsom, Surrey. He was a student at the University of Lancaster, where he obtained a first-class honors degree in history and then a PhD, the subject of his thesis being the Spanish Army in the period 1788–1814. He has occupied a series of academic posts and currently holds an emeritus chair in the Department of History of the University of Liverpool. Professor Esdaile has written extensively on the Napoleonic period, his major works including *The Wars of the French Revolution, 1792–1801* (2018); *The Wars of Napoleon* (1995); *Napoleon’s Wars: An International History, 1803–1815* (2007); *The Peninsular War: A New History* (2002); *Peninsular Eyewitnesses: The Experience of War in Spain and Portugal, 1808–1813* (2008); *The Spanish Army in the Peninsular War* (1988); *The Duke of Wellington and the Command of the Spanish Army, 1812–1814* (1990); *Women in the Peninsular War* (2014); *Fighting Napoleon: Guerrillas, Bandits and Adventurers in Spain, 1808–1814* (2004); *Outpost of Empire: The Napoleonic Occupation of Andalucía, 1810–1812* (2012); *Burgos in the Peninsular War, 1808–1814: Occupation, Siege, Aftermath* (2014); *Napoleon, France and Waterloo: The Eagle Rejected* (2016); and *Walking Waterloo: A Guide* (2019), this last being unquestionably the most detailed guide to the battlefield that has ever been published. For a free digital version of *Walking Waterloo*, please download the app available for both Apple and Android mobile devices under “Waterloo education.” From 2008 to 2015, Esdaile was academic vice president of Peninsular War 200, the official commission established by the Ministry of Defence to coordinate Britain’s part in the commemoration of the bicentenary of the Peninsular War. Finally, in the context of the current work, it is worth noting that he has approximately 50 years of wargaming experience in the spheres of miniatures and board games alike.











